

Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence



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Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence, Inc.

8089 Mary Jane Drive
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Dear Friend in Christ,

In April we received the good news that we finally received our long awaited formal IRS recognition as a 501(c)3 tax deductible organization, retroactive back to May 15, 2013. This tax deductible status was an important step in the further development of this organization's ability to support the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Florence and their school, the Institute of the Sacred Heart (Istituto del Sacro Cuore), in Florence, Italy.

At the end of June, Barbara and I returned from a four week working visit to the Order and Istituto del Sacro Cuore in Florence. We were blest to see the Madres once again and assist them in some of their renovation projects.



Shortly after we arrived we joined them in their end of school outdoor Mass and the feast day celebration of their founder, Saint Madeline Sophie Barat.



Istituto del Sacro Cuore, Viale Michelangelo, 27 - 50125 Firenze, Italia

The Istituto del Sacro Cuore school, operated by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Florence, continues to grow as more and more Catholic schools close within the Diocese of Florence. For the past several years, the number of enrollments have greatly increased at every level of the school; Preschool, Elementary, Middle School and High School. This growth is a dual edged sword for the Madres. While Divine Providence has blessed them with an enormous harvest, the challenge they now face is they lack the proper facilities to be able to open their doors to all the souls that wish to enter.

They believe it is important to offer every child, regardless of their social status or their parents' financial income, the opportunity to receive a solid spiritual and intellectual formation. Now they will be unable to accept many children simply because of a lack of funds and appropriately constructed space.



Back side of the Convent

They continue to be in need of immediate expansion and reconstruction. Parts of the facilities housing the school and religious community date back to the 19th Century and are in serious need of repair and renovation. Part of the house that had been previously used exclusively by the religious community has been transformed into new classrooms to accommodate new

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students. The community of Religious has had to move into the area where they used to provide guest rooms for visiting Priests, Religious, family members, or visiting college students such as when students from Christendom College's Rome Program stayed at the convent.

The guest area now limited to family members of the Religious community has been greatly reduced back to a four room area that previously housed the novitiate cells. However, many sections of the convent and school still are in dire need of structural repairs or renovation.

As part of the renovation efforts in January, the Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence provided funds, as part of the kitchen renewal, for a new walk-in freezer that was necessary to preserve the bulk food used to prepare student meals as well as the food for the religious community.

Originally we had planned to perform some work in the chapel, extending the choir stalls further down the walls toward the altar; however, there remained some design issues due to window and exit locations that had not yet been decided. So instead we offered our skills in helping to finish the renovation of the novitiate area into the new guest quarters.



Convent Chapel

As mentioned previously, the novitiate area had been divided into small rooms or cells. To convert the space into the new guest quarters, a number of the walls were removed to make



larger rooms and doors and halls were moved to accommodate the new floor plan.

Unfortunately, while the workmen were removing some walls and adding new ones they dragged their equipment over the antique brick floor tiles leaving them badly scratched, ruining the original antique look. The floors also had layers of built up wax which in some cases protected the brick but made many of the scratches more pronounced.

Restoration of the floor tiles became our new project.

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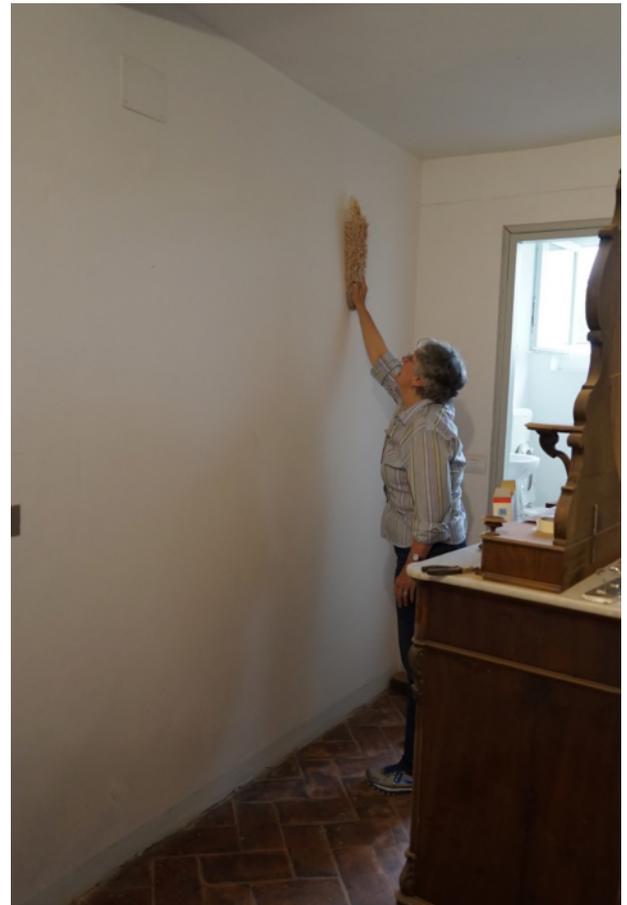
Scratched and heavily waxed tile



Tiles in process of recovery to an antique look.



George Dodge, from Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence, sanding the brick floor tiles.



Barbara Dodge, from Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence, wiping red brick dust from the walls.



Madre Therese mopping red brick dust from the floor.

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In the end, after several days of knee busting work, and the assembly of furniture for the new guest rooms, there was much to show for our efforts.



Entrance Room



Guest Bedroom 1



Guest Bedroom 2



Guest Lounge

If you have not had an opportunity to visit the convent, we would encourage you to do so if you have a chance to visit Florence, Italy. You will be quite impressed with what the Madre's are able to accomplish.

The convent is large and the grounds are extensive. They have their own gardens (for their community, school, and for produce sale), pony, horses (they offer horse back riding lessons), sheep, a cow, chickens, ducks, bee hives, olive trees (they make olive oil for themselves and for sale), grape vines (for their wine), guard dogs, and two caretaker homes.



400 Olive trees to the left of the convent.

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We are including several pictures of the convent grounds for those of you who have not had a chance to visit them.



Convent garden



Horse corral



Tennis court for student athletics



Two of their horses.



Madre Christine with Moses (one of the 5 guard dogs)



One of the caretaker residences

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Children's playground



Rooster and chickens

As you might expect, maintaining such a large and diverse enterprise that includes a Religious Community, a school that consists of pre-school through high school students, and farm is not only time consuming, but financially demanding.

As mentioned earlier, the Istituto del Sacro Cuore does not turn students away based on their parent's ability to pay tuition. The Madres place their priorities on the spiritual and intellectual formation of the child over monetary considerations. Nevertheless, the school may



have to deny access for new students to the school as a result of a lack of funds to provide appropriately constructed space that conforms to current building construction and safety codes.



Madre Christine with students

Although located in "Catholic" Italy, the Religious of the Sacred Heart find themselves on the front lines of their mission. No, they are not located in Africa, Asia, or South America where so many excellent religious orders have given their lives to bring Christ to the pagan indigenous peoples. They find themselves on the frontier of a forgotten missionary territory, but where the paganism is no less real: Europe. Here children usually don't want for food or water; they probably have everything their hearts could desire, everything except true love and the key to happiness. They don't die from plagues or famine. They die from moral and spiritual ignorance and apathy. Yes, most are culturally Christian and they are surrounded by symbols, art and architecture that continually makes reference to their

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Christian heritage. However, the Faith cannot remain a thing buried in the past. It must be a reality lived and loved by the youth of today. **They who lack a solid point of reference and often seek those empty utopias of immediate gratification of the “here” and “now,” are desperately in need of guidance, support and love. It is for these that the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Florence feel the urgency to carry on their work.**



Madre Olimpia with a young student

Knowing that these are trying times for everyone, both economically and otherwise, we realize that the greatest opportunity lies in a united effort on the part of many individuals, giving what they can, to assist them in their need. It is for this reason that relying on Divine Providence and confident in your generosity, we are turning to you for economic support. However big or small, your contribution will enable us to continue to support this critical work of formation and development of these young souls so dear to the Heart of Christ.



Any and all donations are gratefully accepted. If you could assist us on a more continuous basis, please select a subscription for a Monthly donation. Small steady monthly donations by a number of donors soon build up to a steady cash flow that can be counted on for planning purposes. Your donation can automatically be charged to your credit card each month and you can cancel at any time should it become necessary.



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To setup a monthly donation, please go to www.FriendsOfTheSacredHeart.org and click on the Donate tab. Donations of \$20 or \$25 per month by many donors will add up quickly.



Madre Olimpia with students



Students making First Holy Communion

You can also make one time donations from the same page if you prefer. To make a donation by check, make the check out to **Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence, Inc.** and mail to Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence, Inc., 8089 Mary Jane Dr. Manassas, VA 20112



View of Florence from the convent

The Friends of the Sacred Heart of Florence is a recognized 501(c)3 tax deductible organization. Your gift is tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Please be generous!

Please pray for more vocations for the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Florence. The harvest is great but more workers are needed. There is much work left to do.

Thank you for your sacrifice.

Sincerely yours in the Sacred Hearts,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George S. Dodge".

George S. Dodge,
President

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--Istituto del Sacro Cuore -- IMPORTANT UPDATE--

P.S. We just talked with the Madres (8/14/15) and were told the bad news that Florence was hit by a violent hail storm/tornado with winds up to 170kph (105mph) in the late afternoon and evening of Saturday August 1st. There were 60,000 lightning strikes in 24 hours (entire region of Tuscany) and almost two inches of rain and hail in 45 minutes (20 millimeters in just 15 minutes). 15 people were injured in Florence, including one young man critically after being hit by one of the 330 trees felled by the storm. The storm was declared a national catastrophe by the Italian government.



Picture from Florence after the storm passed

Not only will they be hit with the financial cost of the repairs but also for the capital loss of the garden crop and olive oil production for the year.

The storm started around 7pm, but the rain and hail fell so fast that the storm drains were clogged with ice and water flooded the basement of the entire house up to calf levels. The Madres built flood barriers around electrical equipment using salt bags and bailed out the basement as fast as they could until 3am the next morning. Luckily all their animals survived. When the horses lost their barn they managed to find shelter in a car port.

The convent received extensive damage with over 50 windows broken, numerous shutters torn lose, the horse barn blown away, the entire garden crop destroyed, the entire olive harvest from 400 olive trees was lost, a number of trees blown down, and a skylight over



Picture from Florence after the storm

Your donations will be more important than ever following this devastating blow to their operations.



Picture from Florence after the storm



Picture from Florence after the storm



Damage at the Convent



Damage of Convent Roof Tiles



Remains of Destroyed Convent Greenhouse



Damage to Terrazzo wall at the convent