



Sister Irma Geddon stays dry at the car wash.



Guard Noah Shame keeps the order safe.



Sister Mona Little-Moore hands out safe-sex kits during Oregon Bears' Double X Dance at C.C. Slaughters.

missionary process in which new members spend a year as pupils before achieving full status. So far, the Order of Benevolent Bliss boasts six fully professed members. In addition to the three founding members, they are Sister Irma Geddon, Mistress of Communications; Sister Tasha Salad of the Hidden Valley Ranch, Mistress of Collections; and Sister Ghana Maria, an honorary member who transferred to the San Diego house last April. The order also includes a number of aspiring members: three novices (Krissy Fiction, Camela Toe and Oralee Pleasures), four postulants and two aspirants.

Aspirants are entry-level Sisters. They attend events for two months as trainees, observing and absorbing, dressed in simple monochromatic colors (all black or all blue) to mark themselves out from the general public.

Postulants are aspirants who have taken their first serious step toward sisterhood. They spend three months in postulant status, wearing plain black robes with a gray cowl to public events (what Sister Tasha Salad refers to as "the Sith Lord look"). Their makeup consists of white face with eye color but nothing on the lips, signifying that they are present to look and listen, not to talk.

Novices are one step away from being fully professed Sisters. They spend six months in novice status, during which time they must plan and execute a fund-raising project, putting their learning into practice. They wear a white bib, scapular and veil, pillbox hats and a traditional black nun's habit. Their whiteface is enhanced with color on both lips and eyes. Although still under surveillance, they have more freedom than aspirants or postulants. A novice's elevation is voted on at the monthly general business meeting and, if approved, is followed by public vows signifying their ascension to the order's top tier.

Thus it takes a full year or more to achieve the level of fully professed Sister, at which point free dress is allowed as long as it includes the base white face paint and the house's coronet.

In addition to the official levels of sisterhood, there are also guards whose duty it is to escort and protect the Sisters, should protection prove necessary, during their public appearances. (In Portland, so far, it has not.) Noah Shame is captain of the guard for the Portland house. Guards typically dress in all black and may have white face or no facial decoration at all.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence also recognize two categories of nonmembers, figures not directly affiliated with the organization

but worthy of its praise: angels and saints. At present, the Portland house recognizes three angels: Bolivia Carmichaels, Terrika St. James and Mylar Black. It has also blessed several saints, people honored for their exemplary work in the community: Kevin Friends, who married his partner, David Connor, in a public ceremony in March 2004 during the brief period of legal same-sex marriage in Portland; and Darcelle XV and Roxy La Roy, owners of our city's premier drag pavilion, the famed Darcelle XV Showplace.

Scandalous Habits

"Being a Sister represents a huge commitment of time and energy," says Sister Mona Little-Moore. "We have to be able to work together to match the expectations the community has of us."

To that end, they try to get together for "afternoon tea" at least a couple of times a month to promote group cohesion. On the day I met with them, they were convening at just such a tea party, during happy hour at C.C. Slaughters. On Oct. 13 the bar hosted Nunderbear, a fundraiser for the Sisters' condom outreach program featuring Mr. Oregon Bear Mark Brown and Mr. Oregon Cub Brent Marr. In January, Slaughters will host "Angels Over Portland," a benefit for the Sisters.

Since its inception, the Order of Benevolent Bliss has held its monthly business meetings on the third Thursday of each month at the Men's Wellness Center, where they have also conducted personal safety workshops.

"Personal safety is another focus of ours," Sister Mona says. "In Portland last year alone there were 60 reported physical attacks motivated by anti-gay hatred." She says the Sisters' message is "Don't be afraid, but be aware."

On Oct. 14 the Sisters participated in the Portland AIDS Walk. They doubled their advance money-raising goal of \$1,000, proving once again that sweet, sweet charity is alive and well in these lean times.

Another well-known local event with which the Sisters have been involved for the past two years is the Red Dress Party. The Sisters run the party's coat check, being the first to greet the masses of red-dress-clad revelers and the last to wish them well on their way home at night's end.

"When the Red Dress Party people contacted us last year, we knew it was something we couldn't do ourselves," Sister Mona says. So they called in backup: five sisters from Las Vegas, six from Seattle, others

from San Francisco and San Diego. Sister Mona says, "It's something we hope to be involved with indefinitely from now on."

Peacocks of Peace

• So what motivates a person to become a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence, considering the investment of one's personal time and energy that such responsibility entails?

"I myself am a Catholic and had a great aunt who was a nun," says Sister Tasha Salad. However, as you might not be surprised to hear, she is no longer a practicing orthodox Catholic.

"Even as a kid I hated going to church," Sister Tasha elaborates. "I got on my knees for all the wrong reasons."

Sister Mona recalls being warmly approached by an older tourist couple during a public appearance in Old Town. "They were really excited, asked if we were up from San Francisco," she says. "We get a lot of straight couples at our events, saying they've read about us, asking really intelligent questions."

This, it seems, must be the glue that has held the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence together for nearly 30 years, with no sign of dissolution.

"Everyone has a 'Sister moment,'" says Sister Mona. "Mine came during World AIDS Day in 2005, shortly after the Portland chapter began." That day, Mona was among those who led a candlelight vigil that wound its way from Pioneer Square to Silverado. The march of candle-bearing mourners led to a "wailing wall" in which the grieving crowd wrote messages to the loved ones they'd lost.

"When we got to Silverado, there was a guy alone by himself at the bar," Sister Mona says. "I talked to him. His partner had committed suicide the week before. I led him to the wailing wall. Twenty minutes later I saw him at the bar again, teary-eyed. I held him for 20 minutes while he cried. Later, I looked at what he'd written on the wall." She pauses. "It started out angry, but it seemed to end on a note of relative peace."

Ah, the forgotten word: peace. 10

For more information about the SISTERS OF PERPETUAL INDULGENCE visit www.portlandsisters.org.

TONY LETIGRE's motto has always been, "Dip me in honey and throw me to the Sisters." E-mail him at anthonyletigre@gmail.com.

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