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Friends of the Orphans Recognizes Long-Time Haiti Advocate and Supporter for Invaluable Commitment to Individuals in Need

“I would do it all over again, as I have had an extremely happy life.”

– Sister Virginia McMonagle

CHICAGO—June 14, 2010—Although she grew up in a small town in the heart of the Cascade Mountains, Sister Virginia McMonagle’s life has been anything but sheltered. Though her hometown in Roslyn, Wash. barely numbered 1,000 people at the end of the 2000 census, Sister McMonagle has touched the lives of thousands across the U.S. and in Haiti, where she worked alongside the Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos/Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs (NPH/NPFS, Spanish and French for “Our Little Brothers and Sisters”) organization and its American fundraising arm, Friends of the Orphans.

This August, Sister McMonagle will celebrate her 89th birthday and 70th anniversary serving as a Religious of the Sacred Heart.

“Friends of the Orphans is grateful to have the support of outstanding individuals like Sister McMonagle,” said Sharon Saxelby, President and CEO of Friends of the Orphans. “Her passion and enthusiasm for helping people in need are a constant source of inspiration to present and future generations of philanthropists, and we’re happy to extend our congratulations as she celebrates the 70th anniversary of her vows.”

Sister McMonagle’s work in Haiti started in the late 1980s, when she began dividing her time between Haiti and California—where she worked as assistant to the University of San Diego’s Vice President of University Relations. Sister McMonagle spent several months of every year living in Haiti and directly aiding its people, and the remainder of the year in the U.S., where she built a continually-growing platform of loyal supporters and Haitian ambassadors.

It was in 1987, when she met NPH founder Father William B. Wasson, that Sister McMonagle’s work with NPH/NPFS and Friends of the Orphans began. In 1988, inspired by Fr. Wasson and the extreme poverty in Haiti, she moved to Haiti for a year to help him and American physician and priest Father Rick Frechette build an orphanage, school, and hospice for children dying of AIDS and malnutrition in Haiti.

Together, their work ultimately led to the creation of the NPH/NPFS orphanage—St. Hélène’s—in Kenscoff, Haiti’s first pediatric hospital in Petionville (which later became the Father Wasson Rehabilitation Center), and St. Damien Hospital in Tabarre—the only free pediatric hospital in Haiti.

But the path was not easy. After making the decision to move to Haiti and help Fr. Wasson and Fr. Rick, Sister McMonagle told a reporter at the time that the decision to move took several turns—“from refusal, to reluctance, to openness, to acceptance.” Ultimately, she gave in after visiting Haiti and seeing firsthand the country’s extreme poverty and squalor, saying, “Finding water is like finding gold.”

In the U.S., Sister McMonagle founded the nonprofit organization San Diego Friends of Father Wasson’s Orphans to support NPH/NPFS. Recently, her loyal and generous donors joined the larger, nationwide Friends of the Orphans family.

Today, the NPH/NPFS St. Hélène orphanage in Haiti is home to more than 500 children. Although the Fr. Wasson Rehabilitation Center collapsed in January’s 7.0-magnitude earthquake, taking the lives of two volunteers with it, the spirit of the Haitian philanthropic community did not.

St. Damien’s, the 120-bed hospital with an intensive care wing named after Sister Virginia McMonagle, took in and treated hundreds of earthquake victims, many of them children. Thanks to the foundational work laid out by individuals like Sister McMonagle and Fr. Rick, hospital administrator of St. Damien’s, Friends of the Orphans was able to swiftly secure medical supplies, food, water and volunteer support for Haiti after the tragedy.

In 2002, Sister McMonagle retired from her position at the University of San Diego, but she never retired from her commitment to Haiti. She currently lives in the retirement community of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Menlo Park, Calif., where she continues raising funds and volunteer support for NPH/NPFS and Friends of the Orphans.

“Words cannot express how greatly everyone—myself, the staff, volunteers, and the people of Haiti appreciate Sister McMonagle,” said Fr. Rick. “We congratulate her on a wonderful 70 years. Her work has been a blessing for the church and for so many individuals.”

About Friends of the Orphans

A 40-year-old nonprofit organization with regional offices in six states, Friends of the Orphans supports the network of Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH, Spanish for “Our Little Brothers and Sisters”) homes and their outreach programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. Together, Friends of the Orphans and NPH transform the lives of orphaned, abandoned and disadvantaged children by creating families for life through values of unconditional love, shared responsibility and education. This enables children to transcend poverty and grow into caring and productive members of their communities.

Since its founding in 1954, NPH has assisted nearly 16,000 children and currently cares for more than 3,600 in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti,

Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. In 2009, NPH outreach programs, including the only free pediatric hospital in Haiti, assisted 83,000 children and adults. By making a difference in the lives of the children through volunteer and donation opportunities, our supporters' lives are enhanced as well. For more information about Friends of the Orphans, please visit www.friendsoftheorphans.org.

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