

# The Steubenville Register

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## Postulator for sainthood cause for sister who served in Steubenville Diocese visits the city

STEUBENVILLE— They came to walk where she had ministered.

The European entourage was here to see where the late Handmaids of Reparation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sister Maria Alfonsa Bruno of the Child Jesus – whose sainthood cause they are promoting – served, as well as to meet with Bishop R. Daniel Conlon.

Franciscan Order Minor Father Tonino Bono, postulator for Sister Bruno's sainthood cause, was leading what he called a spiritual pilgrimage. Adriano Boeefurri and Gerardo Irrera traveled with him from Sicily.

Accompanying the men to see the bishop were Handmaids of Reparation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sisters Donatella Merulla, in Steubenville for 18 years and presently director of religious education at a parish in Burke, Va., and M. Ernestine Vitello, superior at the Sacred Heart Villa, Steubenville.

Born in 1937, Sister Bruno received her first religious profession Jan. 2, 1960. In a booklet on her titled "A Light in Suffering," it is written "during her two years of novitiate, she contemplated and consolidated her desire to become a missionary during encounters of prayer with the eucharistic and crucified Jesus. This desire, which she also analyzed with her spiritual leaders, eventually became the certainty of a particular call: to leave for the missions."

After four years of religious life, on Feb. 3, 1964, in St. Peter Church, Steubenville, together with three other sisters, she took her perpetual vows before the late Bishop John King Musso. Others professed with her were Sisters Vitello, M. Rosalba Putrino and Mary Attilia Todaro.

"To make herself more useful to the community and obey the request of her superior, Sister M. Emanuela Zattolo, she got her driver's license in 1966. She used it for a few months. But, symptoms of an illness, evident since 1961 – pain in the joints of her hands that spread to her other joints – worsened enough to require recovery in (the former) St. John's Hospital in Steubenville. The diagnosis made Oct. 5, 1967, was serious: chronic rheumatoid arthritis," "A Light in Suffering" reads.

And, it continued: Despite the medical care, prayers and attention of her maternal aunt, Alaimo Maria Benfante, who welcomed her to her home in California, the disease progressed.

In June 1968, Sister Bruno returned to Italy. Assigned to obedience of the motherhouse of the Handmaids of Reparation in Messina, she spent the rest of her life there. She died Aug. 23, 1994.

Some of the people who had met Sister Bruno founded an association, "Friends of Sister Maria Alfonsa of the Child Jesus," to keep alive her memory and charisma, to deepen the awareness of her spirituality and to spread her message of Christian life.

Since 2001, the cause of beatification and canonization of Sister Bruno has been ongoing. Most recently, a miracle has been attributed to her – the cure of a woman who suffered from pancreatic cancer with



Franciscan Order Minor Father Tonino Bono, left; Adriano Boeefurri, second from right, and Gerardo Irrera, right, visit with Bishop R. Daniel Conlon. The men were joined by Handmaids of Reparation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sisters Donatella Merulla, seated left, and M. Ernestine Vitello. (Photo by DeFrancis)

whom she had prayed.

Father Bono said of his visit, with Sister Merulla as interpreter, that he wanted to thank Bishop Conlon and visit the places where Sister Bruno had lived while in Steubenville from 1960-68. She resided in a house on Fourth Street.

They also visited Franciscan University of Steubenville, which she attended for a semester; went to the medical facility where she received treatment; and motored to Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pa., where she studied.

Though she left medals at the site of what would become Sacred Heart Villa, she was not in Steubenville when the house was built.

Father Bono said he met sister in 1968 when he was a seminarian. He said that he went and talked with her daily after she had been wheeled into church. She spent 23 years in a wheelchair.

"I was drawn to her – her smile – and even before she talked, I could feel she was full of God – the way she accepted her suffering as a vocation. She was very close to the Eucharist. She drew from the Eucharist," he said.

Father Bono anticipates closing the beatification process by 2006, when he expects to send the "boxes and files" to Rome. No time limit is given for consideration of the beatification.

As for his trip to Steubenville – Father Bono said, "It's a dream.

"I can't believe we're here walking in the footsteps that sister walked.

"She loved America.

"Half of her heart was left in Steubenville."

The three men spent three days in Steubenville and during an about three-week trip to the United States and Canada, also visited New York City, Washington, D.C., and Niagara Falls.