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Mother Antonia Brenner, the 'prison angel,' dies

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NCR Today

Mother Antonia Brenner, known as the "prison angel" for her work with prisoners in Mexico, died Oct. 17, according to *The New York Times*. She was 86.

She lived in a prison cell in Tijuana, coming and going freely but present to meet prisoners' needs. The *Times* article reports that she was married twice and had eight children before becoming a nun, and in her 50s, she founded a community of older women to work with prisoners.

The community, Eudist Servants of the Eleventh Hour, claims St. John Eudes, close friend of Vincent de Paul, as the head of the spiritual family that the Eudist sisters have joined. The 11th hour is a reference to the call to vocation to older women. Their group photo includes 19 sisters, most of whom work at the La Mesa prison in Tijuana, where Mother Antonia worked. Others operate a women's house for released prisoners and families who come to visit inmates at La Mesa. One sister lives in Pennsylvania and offers retreats on prison ministry. Another operates a House of Discernment in Texas. Others live in the United States and commute to Tijuana to work at La Mesa. Their ministry there is to the guards as well as prisoners.

All the sisters are self-supporting economically and have their own health care. They renew their vows each year "if mutually agreeable."

The website has a photo of a cross made by an inmate for Mother Antonia from three nails. He is now free and continues to make these crosses, worn by the sisters on a shoelace to remind them to wash the feet of the poor.

Mother Antonia had a dream of Jesus crucified for her and the call for her to comfort the suffering, a story beautifully told on the site. According to the *Times* story, her youngest son was still in high school and

she gave custody of him to her ex-husband when she answered this call, moving to Tijuana to work at La Mesa. The *Times* reports that Mother Antonia is survived by seven of her children and by many grandchildren and that she stayed in contact with her children during her life.

The Prison Angel by Mary Jordan & Kevin Sullivan tells the story of Mother Antonia's rich and full life.

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