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Home Sellers Bury Statues of St. Joseph

By MELISSA TRUJILLO, AP

BOSTON (Sept. 19) - Judy Moore knew she was going to have trouble selling the home with the really steep driveway. For help, she turned not to an advertiser or a fellow real estate agent, but to someone she hadn't used since the last slowdown in the housing market: St. Joseph.



Elise Amendola, AP

A 17th century nun is responsible for the belief that a buried St. Joseph icon can help sell property.

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Saint as salesman: blessed or bogus?

Blessed	66%
Bogus	34%

Total Votes: 8,625

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She buried a figurine of the Roman Catholic saint upside down in the home's yard. And soon, sure enough, she had her sale.

"I've seen all different kinds of markets, and I do believe pulling from whatever powers I can to make it work," said Moore, an agent in the Boston suburb of Lexington. "Sometimes just baking bread doesn't do it anymore."

Now that the red-hot housing market of the past five years has begun to cool off, homeowners

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and real estate agents from Boston's heavily Italian North End to California are doing whatever they can to clinch a sale, and that includes putting their faith in a small, plastic statue of a saint.

Sellers of religious merchandise say sales of St. Joseph statues have shot up over the past year all over the country.

Instructions that come with St. Joseph statues variously suggest burying him upside down or upright, in the front yard, backyard or near the "For Sale" sign, facing the home, the heavens or the street, and saying a prayer or making a simple request for a buyer.

Joseph, the carpenter husband of the Virgin Mary, is the patron saint of laborers and house hunters, among others. The belief that St. Joseph aids home sellers traces back to St. Teresa of Avila, a nun in the 16th century who buried a medal of the saint and prayed to him to help get land for convents. The ritual seemed to work, and the practice, or variations of it, spread.

The modern tradition in the United States dates back at least four decades and is believed to have first gained in popularity on the heavily Catholic East Coast.

"In times of crisis, people try anything," said the Rev. Harvey Egan, a professor in Boston Colleges theology department. "Many people turn to God or they turn to the saints or they turn to religion in times of crisis. It shouldn't be like that, but that's the way it is."

Phil Cates, whose StJosephStatue.com of Modesto, Calif., offers 4- and 8-inch white statues, said he expects his business to grow 200 percent to 250 percent this year over 2005. Roman Inc. of Addison, Ill., which sells four styles to stores, has seen its sales increase 33 percent this year, chief executive Dan Loughman said.


The Society for the Propagation of the Faith of Boston, which runs a small store downtown, reported no trouble getting rid of its monthly supply of 100 statues or more.

"It's going gangbusters now," Loughman said. "I think it's just tough times in the real estate market that's driving them mostly."


Demand isn't limited to Catholic homeowners or real estate agents.

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 "We look at St. Joseph as really a nondenominational saint," Cates said. "I think that what St. Joseph is about is about wakening the hopefulness in people. That hopefulness can lead to expectations, can instill confidence. We all know that confidence has led to miracles throughout the centuries."

John Stastny of Denton, Texas, said his Catholic faith -- and faith in the St. Joseph ritual -- helped him sell two homes in Colorado. He is now trying to sell his current home without a real estate agent and expects his old, white St. Joseph statue to come through again.

 "I think it helps me build my confidence that I can do it, and I know I can," he said. "If you have faith in anything, you can accomplish quite a bit."

Homeowner Diana Grammont is not Catholic but decided to give St. Joseph a try after her friend sold a home within a week of following the ritual. Grammont and her husband buried a painted, china statue upside down in the front yard of their Lexington home, which has been on the market since the summer began.

"Who knows what will come of it? It's worth a try," she said. "We're just both kind of open to possibility."

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