

Expecting a Miracle to Sell Your House

Continued from page D1

to the National Association of Realtors.

Statues of St. Joseph sold online can be as tall as 12 inches. One, made of colored resin, portrays St. Joseph cradling the baby Jesus. Yet most home sellers favor the simpler three- or four-inch replicas—most of which are made in China and often depict St. Joseph as a carpenter.

Most statues come in a "Home Sale Kit" that is priced at around \$5 and includes burial instructions and a prayer. One site, Good Fortune Online, recently added another kit with a statue of St. Jude—known as the patron saint of hopeless causes—"to help those with a difficult property to sell," the site says. Another site, Stjosephstatue.com, takes orders for its "Underground Real Estate Agent Kits" at 1-888-BURY-JOE.

Demand for the statues has been growing. Ron Weissman, who sells the statues at Good Fortune Online, says about six months ago he switched to online transactions because the increase in calls—from about two a week to 25 calls a day—were too much to handle. Richard Weigang, owner of www.catholicstore.com, says he sells about 400 statues a month, double the amount he sold a year ago.

In Catholicism, St. Joseph, a carpenter, is honored as the husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus. Representing a humble family man, he is the patron saint of home, family and house-hunting, according to the Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit priest and author of "My Life With the Saints." Popular belief holds that people who wish to enlist St. Joseph's help in selling a house should bury his replica upside-down in the



Patrick Conlon/PNSJ

yard. (Apartment dwellers are advised to put him in a potted plant.)

Methods of burying the statue vary. Instructions in one package give buyers several options, including burying it upside-down next to the "For Sale" sign, burying it three feet from the rear of the house and burying it next to the front door facing away from the home. Phil Cates, owner of stjosephstatue.com, says: "I've seen it buried in all types of places with all types of ceremonies." He says the detailed burial instructions are largely intended to prevent people from forgetting where they put their St. Joseph. (His kits advise burying it facing it away from the

The St. Joseph 'Underground Real Estate Agent Kit' from www.stjosephstatue.com

house, to symbolize leaving.)

Theologians say there's no official doctrine that calls for the statue's interment. The practice may have stemmed from medieval rites of land possession, in which conquerors claimed land by planting a cross or banner, says Jaime Lara, associate professor of Christian Art and Architecture at Yale Divinity School. Mr. Lara also suggests that the tradition may have gotten mixed up at some point with folklore surrounding St. Anthony. St. Anthony, known as a matchmaker, would often be held ransom, upside-down, until he found a husband for someone's daughter, he says.

Some clergy aren't sure how St. Joseph would feel about his replica ending up on its head in the dirt, and suggest displaying it somewhere in the house instead.

"I think it's much more respectful than burying the poor guy," says Msgr. Andrew Connell, the archdiocesan director of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Boston. Some retailers, such as Mr. Weigang, owner of www.catholicstore.com, also encourage buyers to put the statues in the house.

"We don't advocate burying," he says. "Some of those statues are quite beautiful."

Catholic leaders also say that faith and devotion are necessary, in addition to burying a statue, otherwise the practice amounts to little more than superstition or magic. But they are also enjoying the saint's newfound popularity. "If they have a good result and they think it was St. Joseph, it might inspire them to practice more," says Msgr. Connell.

Once someone's home sells, the custom holds, the statue should be dug up and put in a place of honor in the new home. That's what Ms. Luna did after she and her husband sold their house shortly after burying St. Joseph. She put the statue in her office in their new home in Portland, Oregon.

But not everyone is aware of the follow-up step. Trudy Lopez and her husband buried a statue of St. Joseph when they were trying to sell their condo, even though Ms. Lopez is Jewish and her husband is a nonpracticing Catholic. They sneaked out late at night, worried they might be breaking a condo association rule.

"And I'm thinking, 'If my family knew what I am doing, they'd die,'" she says.

Soon they got an offer, but didn't realize they were supposed to bring the statue with them to their new home.

"I'm afraid a lot of the statues won't be unearthed and someone will go over St. Joseph's feet with a lawnmower," says Father Martin.

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Quick Fix

Reconciling Family Members' Schedules

■ **Problem:** Keeping track of all of the schedules in your family.

■ **Solution:** Go electronic with the family calendar. Google (calendar.google.com) and Yahoo (calendar.yahoo.com) calendars are dominant. Google's format allows you to create color-coded calendars for different members of the family. These can be viewed separately, or on one page. To sync calendars with Yahoo, each family member would need to open a separate user account, or you could form a family group in



groups.yahoo.com. Both calendars include a variety of sharing and privacy options as well as email and mobile alerts. Famundo.com offers a family message board, a list manager for shopping or trip planning, and a "vault" for secure storage of valuable documents.

■ **Caveat:** Before you choose an online calendar, check to see if it syncs with the hand-held you use. For instance, Google's calendar can import and export from Microsoft Outlook and iCal but cannot sync with those. —Nancy Matsumoto