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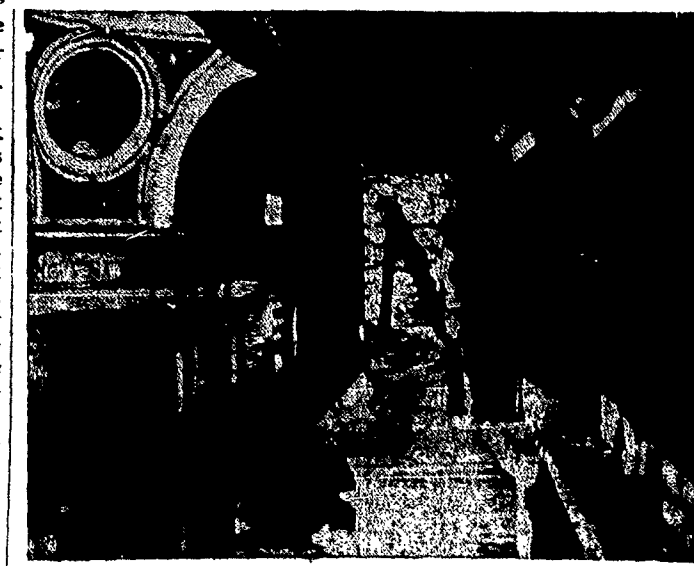
**Story of the Sampietrini**  
**Upkeep of World's Greatest Basilica Employs Corps of 60 Skilled Sextons**

By REV. JOSEPH J. SULLIVAN (Correspondent, N.C.W.C. News Service)

Vatican City — (By Mail) — Whether it's a crack in the great wall or a falling section of plaster, whether the base of a great case in the sacristy, if a section of marble new hinge is needed for the door of a vestment pilaster must be reinforced or replaced, or a inlay in the beautiful floor yields to endless wear and cracks, or the floor just needs to be swept or mopped—whatever it is in St. Peter's, the Sampietrini do it. Inside and out, whatever must be done, or redone, in St. Peter's is the task of the maintenance corps of sixty-odd men who get their very name from the fact that their lives and their work are given to the care of the great basilica. Full time, even overtime, they are kept busy all year 'round, for there is always something to be done to maintain the world's largest church, the central shrine of all Christendom.

**THE BUSIEST MAN** in an American parish, the one whose work is never done, is the janitor. Cleaning the church, fixing a leak in the roof or a broken window, or a hundred and one other things, to say nothing of preparing for funerals and cleaning up after weddings, keep him on the go all the time.

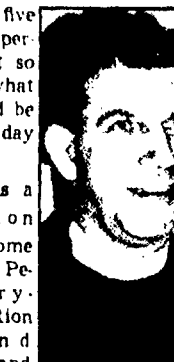
When you realize that you could put most churches in a corner of St. Peter's, that the number of people who come there even on an ordinary day averages a minimum of 5,000, that the number of priests who offer daily Mass on its three dozen altars would make a noticeable group if gathered in an ordinary church, that whenever a ceremony is held they must prepare for, and clean up after, from five to seven thousand persons, it's not so hard to see what 60 men could be doing every day in the year.



One of the Sampietrini, maintenance men of the famed St. Peter's Basilica, is pictured at work on a mosaic high up in the interior of the basilica. These men work throughout the year keeping the world's largest church a gleaming and clean shrine. (NC Photo)

Tradition is a very common word in Rome and at St. Peter's. Everywhere tradition lives and breathes and marches along F. SULLIVAN the "arches of the years." Side by side with the great and glorious walk numberless smaller, less noticeable, but not less real traditions.

One of these less noticeable but certainly not less noteworthy traditions related to St. Peter's is that of these housekeepers of the greatest of all God's houses on earth. As a group their history is as old as the building itself. From the time it was completed there began the task of preserving and further adorning it, and a permanent group of men with proper technical and artistic superiors was assembled and assigned to the exclusive care of the edifice.



They have been at it ever since and from the look of things, will be at it for a long time hence. It's in their families, in their blood, in their bones—San Pietro! Practically everyone in the crew is related to someone else—grandfathers, sons, grandsons, uncles and nephews, brothers and cousins.

That's not the only thing characteristic of them which has been going on for a long time. Their work itself smacks of the Middle Ages—a veritable guild-system all their own. There are the carpenters, the stone-workers, the plumbers, electricians and painters, the metal-workers and what we would call the steeple-jacks, the men who do the climbing work on the exterior and interior of the building.

Following in the steps of father or brother or uncle, a lad is allowed to do very much in the basilica he must learn all the simple steps, the fundamentals of the work, in the shops which are hidden away beneath the right side of St. Peter's unexposed to public view or notice.

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**Retired Protestant's Home Will Be Retreat**

New Canaan, Conn.—(NC)—A 25-room house with a private chapel attached, erected by a retired Episcopalian, has been purchased by the Holy Ghost Fathers for laymen's retreats, the Very Rev. Joseph A. Kirkbridge, C.S.Sp., head of the Ferndale Retreat League, has announced.

The chapel, after the necessary changes are made, will be used for nocturnal adoration by retreatants. It is planned to hold the first week-end retreat in January, 1949. The granite structure is surrounded by six and one-half acres of landscaped property. It is the first permanent house of the Retreat League.

de Montfort and St. Lucia Filipin. The engineer who is his boss says Giuseppe is better than the books very often. Besides saving the time necessary for consulting the books when a problem comes up, he has probably done the thing before and remembers what the books very often don't tell—the practical experience of the difficulty and how it was solved. And the last time that particular problem came up may have been 40 years ago.

He himself says that it's not always old stuff either, that, no matter how often it happens, there's always some new twist to make it interesting. Every so often something really new comes along such as changing from lamps and candles to electric lighting for ornamentation.

**CROWNING FEATURE** about Giuseppe and his men is their spirit of devotion to their work. It is much more than just fidelity to duty, it's a labor of love. San Pietro is theirs—their pride and joy. When something is to be done, it is to be done perfectly. When something goes wrong, it is not just an accident, it's either a misfortune or a catastrophe. Their own homes wouldn't receive any more painstaking care and effort than the work.

The closing chapter of the story of the members of the Sampietrini is an unconscious tradition which simply works out as the final proof, the fitting conclusion to their homely, human annual. For longer than anyone can remember, the story has been repeating itself that when an old-timer can no longer come to San Pietro each day to look after its aches and pains—it's time to die.

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