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Couple writes book on retreat houses

By Mark Pattison

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A retired Army officer and his wife so enjoyed their vacation stays at retreat houses that they've written a two-volume guide to help other travelers combine a vacation with a personal journey of faith.

James and Victoria Hughes sold out a modest 300-copy first printing of Travelers' Guide to Overnight or Short Stay at Religious Community Guest and Retreat Houses Around the World, with more orders coming as the second edition was at the printer.

The listings are as exhaustive as the book's title: names, addresses and phone numbers for more than 800 religious houses in Europe, more than 500 in North America and 70 in Oceania.

Hughes and his wife "did the grunt work" of compiling the list, he said in a recent telephone interview with Catholic News Service from Freeport, Fla.

The Hugheses, who are Catholic, didn't visit all the houses themselves, although they have stayed at three in Italy and one in Connecticut.

To obtain an extensive and accurate a list as possible, Hughes said, the project started with a mailing to 300 religious houses worldwide. More help came from the U.S. papal pro-nuncio's office in Washington; European Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists; motherhouses; and bishops.

"It's grown like topsy from the beginning," said the 75-year-old Hughes, who noted that all of the data has been stored in a computer.

Vacationers who use the book to make reservations at religious houses — Hughes advises writing or calling preferred spots as soon as vacation dates and sites are known — are likely to sleep in historic accommodations.

"The monastery in Pavia (Italy) goes back to the 15th century. We visited a convent in Italy; its chapel was built in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries," Hughes said. "In Italy, particularly, all the history's in the church."

Seventy-five to 80 percent of the listings are of Catholic houses. "The Catholics have been in the retreat business longer than any of the others," he said.



Defining the distinction between guest houses and retreat houses, Hughes said guest houses are in "the bed and breakfast business," whereas retreat consider their visitors as retreatants whom they will accommodate for the length of their stay.

Since some retreat houses may not have listed themselves as such in the book, Hughes advised, "Roll with the punch."

He said religious houses compare favorably to hotels that furnish "a simple room, modest — frugal, I suppose you might say — like Motel 6. At a guest house you get a good room and three meals for no more" than the cost of a budget hotel.

The travelers' guide was the Hugheses' first book. "I've got to do something before I die," he joked. "As the saying goes, you get old too quick and smart too late."

He said he now wants to add information about religious houses in Africa, Asia and South America to his current listings.

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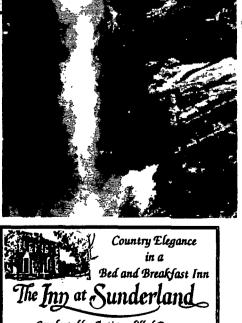
EDITORS' NQTE: The two-volume guide can be obtained only by sending \$17.95 postpaid to Hugen Press, P.O. Box 2286, Bloomfield, N.J. 07003. Information on religious houses can be sent to the Hugheses in care of the publisher.



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