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University of San Diego

Office of Public Relations

News Bureau

BISHOP MAHER STATUE GRACES USD CAMPUS

A giant bronze statue of the late Bishop Leo T. Maher has been dedicated in his honor and installed in the Rose Garden at the north entrance to Maher Hall at the University of San Diego.

The 7-foot-high statue, created by noted sculptor J. Michael Wilson, depicts Bishop Maher in his clerical vestments, smiling and extending a hand forward. The work was commissioned and donated by Helen Anne Bunn, a long-time friend of the Bishop and of USD. The statue was unveiled in a private ceremony in April.

The idea for a Maher statue came to Mrs. Bunn while she was visiting the Vatican, where she is on the Board of Directors for the Patrons of the Arts of the Vatican Museum, and was notified by phone that the Bishop had been diagnosed with a brain tumor.

"Bishop Maher touched the lives of so many people and was such a great leader that I felt we had to do something to honor him," said Mrs. Bunn, who is a Lady of the Holy Sepulchre, a Catholic lay service organization with close ties to Maher.

"I felt that a statue in his memory would be just right. I immediately called Michael Wilson and he said he would be honored to take on the project," Mrs. Bunn said.

Wilson, a 38-year-old Southern California native, is probably best known for "Victory's Gate," a monumental bronze sculpture

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commissioned for the 1984 Summer Olympic equestrian events at the Fairbanks Ranch Country Club. His other commissions include "Paddy Chayefsky," a life-size bronze bust for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame and "Ken Schiffer," a life-size bronze bust for the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association.

Wilson began work on the Maher statue last year as the Bishop, having served as head of the Diocese of San Diego for 21 years, retired and spent his remaining months in his Mission Hills home. Early this year, Mrs. Bunn brought Wilson to visit the Bishop and the two men discussed the sculpture. Six weeks later, Bishop Maher passed away on Saturday, February 23 at age 75.

Ernest Hahn, who succeeded Bishop Maher as chairman of the USD Board of Trustees, said at the unveiling ceremony, "Bishop Maher is truly here with us and will abide here as has his inspiration which guided us for more than 20 years during the life and growth of the University of San Diego."

After the statue was unveiled by Mrs. Bunn and USD President Author Hughes, three generations of the celebrated Romero family of classical guitarists -- Celedonio, Celin and Celino -- performed live for assembled guests. The Romero family was very close to Bishop Maher and played for him privately in the last weeks of his life.

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Caption for attached photo:
Left to right: University of San Diego President Author Hughes and Helen Anne Bunn unveil a giant bronze statue of the late Bishop Leo T. Maher at Maher Hall on the USD campus.