



Journeys

SISTERS OF ST. CASIMIR

Vol. XXXVII No. 1
Spring/Summer 2023



'Welcome Back' Mother Maria Mass and Father Anthony Staniukynas Statue Rededication

By Kathy Headley

Kathy writes for the Southwest News-Herald. She is the author of two books: Images of Chicago Lawn/Marquette Manor and Legendary Locals of Chicago Lawn and Marquette Manor, both featuring Mother Maria and the Sisters of St. Casimir. She is a member of neighboring St. Rita of Cascia Parish. Being neighbors, Kathy originally became acquainted with the Sisters through community meetings and projects. Her daughter attended Maria High School. Kathy has a great respect for the Sisters and all they do.

Excitement filled the air at 2601 West Marquette Road, Chicago, IL, on the third Saturday of April as a crowd numbering over 150 entered the building amid greetings of 'Welcome Back' and 'Welcome Home.'

After a hiatus, due in large part to the pandemic, friends and family of the Sisters of St. Casimir and devotees of Venerable Mother Maria Kaupas

could once again join the Sisters of St. Casimir in praying for the beatification of Mother Maria. And this time they would also be there to witness the rededication of the statue out front of Rev. Dr. Anthony Staniukynas.

As the opening chords of the hymn Joyful the Day sounded, Paul Binkis, holding the processional cross led the entrance procession. Paul, who grew up in Nativity BVM parish learning from the Sisters, is also an SSC Associate. Following Paul were Sisters Theresa Dabulis and Marilyn Karpovich, gently carrying in Mother Maria's rosary and blue cord, both considered second class relics.

Next came Deacon Joe Panek who was encouraged in his pursuit of the

deaconate by the Sisters at his home parish of Immaculate Conception and continues to assist at the chapel. Following Deacon Joe was the morning's celebrant, Rev. Tom Kasputis. Growing up, Father Tom also attended Nativity BVM School, was an altar boy at the parish church and remains a close friend of the Sisters.

In her opening remarks, Sister Margaret Petcavage immediately put everyone at ease observing, "You can tell this is a Catholic service because the front rows are all empty." Once the laughter subsided, and folks dutifully made their way into front pews, she gave a brief glimpse of Mother Maria's life including some fascinating information to visitors saying,

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The SSC Legacy Continues: Seeking Together the Kingdom of God



Greetings to you, dear Friends!

Stop! Are you loved by God? We so often take each moment, each day for granted! How have you been blessed today? Can you count the ways?

Venerable Servant of God, Mother Maria Kaupas, our beloved Foundress, by the example of her holy life, continues to re-

mind us of this when we take to heart her encouraging words: “God is here. God loves us and nothing will happen without His knowledge. We need to only persevere in His love.” When we take the time to pay attention to what God is asking of us and are mindful of all the blessings God is working in us, we become more aware of what makes our lives more meaningful. One cannot help but be in awe of all that happens in God’s time.

With deep faith in what God was asking of her, Mother Maria shows us the way as she answered her call to found the Sisters of St. Casimir and to seek the kingdom of God fostering the faith life of those we would serve through our ministries of education and health care. But the kingdom is everywhere and with God’s elusive force, we saw the need to branch out even more, ministering to the people in Lithuania, New Mexico, and Argentina. We, Sisters of St. Casimir, continued and to this day, continue to heed Mother Maria’s words: “Always more, always better, always with love,” which prompted us to venture out to become even more involved in social justice issues: immigration, cease-fire, vacant properties, affordable housing, reclaiming the neighborhoods, predatory lending, poverty, and our retired Sisters even opening our own St. Elizabeth Food Pantry.

The Kingdom is everywhere if we just listen: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in need and you helped me, I needed to be educated and you taught and inspired me.” All these actions of justice and love, and caring for one another usher us into the kingdom of God. As the median age of our Sisters continued to rise, and we could see that we no

longer could do what we have always done, we found that YOU with us, could continue to seek the kingdom at our Schools, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Social Service Ministries. We are so blessed by YOU who feel compelled to take up Mother Maria’s story, believing that her life can inspire others to respond to the needs of the world around them with deeper faith and a generosity of spirit. Our legacy is alive through YOU at Holy Cross Sinai Hospital, Catalyst Maria, K-12, School, Villa Joseph Marie High School in Holland, PA, the Mother Maria Kaupas Center in Mount Carmel, PA, Catholic Charities serving the people of Chicago from our former Motherhouse. How we are blessed!

The Sisters today continue to seek the kingdom as we remain ever faithful to our call to religious life and our love-filled response: “Always more, always better, always with love.” Our ministry of prayer has become a powerhouse of prayer – the prayer request lists are long and never ending. YOU can also be assured that each of you are remembered in our daily prayer. We also seek the kingdom by our ministry of presence – through our peacefulness, our smiles, our listening ears, our words of wisdom, faith, love, encouragement, and consolation, our greetings filled with blessings for a great day, our phone calls or emails to just say “I’m thinking of you,” anyway we can make someone’s day a little better. And as you continue to read this “Journeys” you will see the ways that “God does love us” and our blessings abound.

In our SSC Legacy Room, there is a bell! It was the bell that was used to call us to prayer, to meals. Today we would like to invite you to ring it virtually. Let its chime be your call to action as the legacy continues through YOU. Let us go forth doing good in the world, seeking the Kingdom of God. Together let us “Go Boldly!”

*Peace and blessings!
Always, with love and prayers,*

Sister Immacula Wendt, S.S.C.

Sister Immacula Wendt
and all the Sisters of St. Casimir





From left: Sister Nancy Streitmatter, Wendy Lynn, Kevin Gallagher, Rita Gallagher, and Mary Beth McCarthy enjoy fellowship, coffee and refreshments in the dining room at St. Casimir Center after the rededication of the Father A. Staniukynas statue. (Photos by Karen Strabel)

continued from cover story

“Mother Maria prayed in this very chapel, always in the fourth pew from the back, the left side. She died here in this building, was buried from this chapel and now her sarcophagus rests in the back of this chapel.” “Blessed George Matulaitis, who consecrated this chapel in 1925, was a good friend of Mother Maria.” And then surprising much of the congregation, she added, “Two saints who knew one another and prayed together in this very chapel.”

In fact, during his visit in 1913, Blessed George conducted a ten-day retreat for the Sisters of St. Casimir. Coming here directly after his arrival in Chicago, he preached, heard confessions and helped to complete and coordinate the Sisters of St. Casimir Constitution.

As Mass concluded, congregants followed Father Tom Kasputis outside for the rededication. The warm air and bright sunlight was, in itself perhaps, a tribute to this man who, while he could speak eight languages fluently, chose to dedicate several years of his life to the growth of this fledgling congregation on the south side of Chicago.

As we all know, Father Staniukynas was of invaluable help to the young Sister Maria as she struggled with the workings of founding a new congregation. After all, it was the first of its kind in America, dedicated to the welfare of the Lithuanian community, which was growing in population as increasing numbers of immigrants

began calling Chicago their home.

Perhaps that could best be summed up in the words of Mother Cyril, IHM, when upon Father Anthony’s death, she sent a note of condolence to Mother Maria speaking of a “keen appreciation of his spiritual ability to lay the solid foundation for a great spiritual superstructure in your community.”

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Catholic Charities leadership team and friends of the Sisters of St Casimir enjoy the pastries and coffee in the dining room at St. Casimir Center, after the April 15 Mother Maria Mass and statue rededication ceremony. From left: Pat and Danna Darragh, Elida Hernandez (Catholic Caritas CFO), Marie Simon (Catholic Charities Legal Counsel and COO), Ann Grelecki (Catholic Charities Chief of Staff), and Sally Blount (Catholic Charities CEO and President).

**'Welcome Back'
cover story continued:**

The nearly 100-year-old statue, originally a gift from the school children taught by the Sisters, was cleaned and refurbished last Fall; new pavement laid and two pillars were added on the sides. And as one pillar so aptly states: "He died, but his works live on."

As usual the SSCs ability to bring people together was evident, as everyone readily accepted the invitation to come in for refreshments. The dining room filled quickly. At table after table conversations were



SSC Auxiliary President Ginger Madden presents Sister Immacula with a check.

peppered with 'Good to see you again' and 'How have you been?' Smiles were all around the room.

Partway through the social, Ginger Madden, President of the SSC Auxiliary, surprised all by presenting Sister Immacula, Interim Superior, with a check for \$5,000.

No one seemed in a hurry to leave that Saturday as all just seemed happy to be there in the dining room catching up with Sisters and friends.

And, if one left the celebration through the front door on Marquette Road, the sun might catch the statue of Father Staniukynas,



**Lithuanian Roman Catholic Charities
Founding Father and First Treasurer
1914-1918**

This monument was a gift from the school children taught by the Sisters of St. Casimir

**S.V. KAZIMIERO SESERU VIENUOLIJS
ISTEIGĖJAS**

**Rev. Dr. Anthony Staniukynas
1865-1918**

Spiritual director and educator of the Sisters of St. Casimir. Buried at St. Casimir Cemetery, Chicago, IL

He died, but his works live on.

A current photo of the Father Staniukynas statue with the side panels that were also refurbished and the the inscription shown in the insets.

'Welcome Back'

forcing one to realize that he is facing the entrance which leads to the Legacy Room, a capsule of SSC accomplishments here and around the world thus far.

And one might realize that without the Sisters of St. Casimir and Father Staniukynas this neighborhood and others like it would most likely have developed very differently, and many people that have called this neighborhood home may have had a very different life with very different opportunities.

So, as he keeps a silent vigil at the entrance, words whispered to the Sisters keeping vigil with him just a few short days before his passing, come to mind, "May God bless you. May all your works flourish."



From left: Sister Virginia Gapsis, Sister Rita Marie Kerdock and Anna Belle O'Shea enjoy coffee and conversations.



From left standing : Ron Jordan, Grinny Walton, Sister Deborah Borneman, SSCM and (sitting) Sister Deborah Romanuski continue to celebrate the return of Mother Maria Mass enjoying refreshments with many friends of the Sisters of St. Casimir.



Paul and Susan Binkis enjoy the celebratory day with the return of the Mother Maria Mass (after 3 years of no Masses due to pandemic and restrictions of using the St. Casimir chapel). Paul and Susan are SSC Associates and Susan is the SSC Auxiliary moderator.

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JANUARY 1, 2022 – DECEMBER 31, 2022

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The Sisters thank all of their benefactors and apologize for any names that may have been inadvertently omitted.

Walking in the Footsteps of Mother Maria

By Sister Margaret Zalot

You might find this Sister helping out when and where needed, especially with our Sisters in Assisted Living at Franciscan Village. Or pushing a cart full of fresh fruit down the AL-100 corridor — but you might notice one selection of fruit does not fit all. She knows who likes “cuties” (mandarin oranges), who enjoys grapes but cannot see the stems (so she takes the time to make her grapes stemless), who enjoys a fresh orange, but cannot peel it herself, who likes Pepperidge Farm Milano dark chocolate cookies for a change of pace, and who enjoys a ripe banana for an afternoon treat.

Yes, these healthy fruit treats joyfully delivered right to each



Sister Bernadette Marie Janus

Sister’s door brings a little bit of happiness and a lot of gratitude.

And who would be the bearer of such treats? None other than Sister Bernadette Marie Janus.

Sister Bernadette Marie has such a gentle way about her in each encounter with a Sister. She brings with her a bit of South Philly as she talks, and the love and care she shared with her dear friend, Sister Pieta, she now shares with so many others. Sister Pieta and Mother Maria would both be so proud of her.

Sister Bernadette Marie is someone to know, someone to imitate. You might even want to walk in her footsteps, too.



Walking in the footsteps of Mother Maria...

Sharing faith, life, and love...

In the Assisted Living Apartments of Franciscan Village; on the multiple phone calls to family and friends; in notes of thanks and appreciation to members of the wider community; And who would this be? None other than Sister Leandra Yerkes.

Yes, Sister Leandra lives well her daily prayer...

Dear Jesus, help me to share your fragrance everywhere I go...that my life may be a radiance of yours. John Cardinal Newman

In her daily interactions she tries to think before she acts and accentuate the positive. When she reads or sees something on TV that is inspiring or impressive she takes the time to write a short note to the author or the celebrant or the star – praising



Sister Leandra Yerkes

people who are doing good or making impactful statements. Her notes are well received and in her own words “she makes them happy” and she is happy, too. Even happier when she received replies from Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, or Sister Janet Schaeffer, OP, author of *Advent Reflections*, and Gary Sinise, founder of the Gary Sinise Foundation for military veterans. From her seemingly small world, Sister Leandra reaches beyond to the wider world. Thank you, Sister Leandra.

Sister Leandra is someone to know, someone to imitate. You might even want to walk in her footsteps, too.



Along the Way

Ministry of the Sisters Today Ministry of Prayer, Presence, and Reaching Out to Others

In addition to more time in prayer and sharing their presence, these Sisters provide additional service:

Sister Elenisa Buzas: Crochets beautiful quilts for friends of the SSCs and connects with the Sisters in Argentina.

Sister Margaret Petcavage: is the vice-postulator for the cause of Mother Maria Kaupas, and the key person coordinating the filming of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) documentary: *They Might Be Saints: Mother Maria Kaupas*.

Sister Theresa Papsis: drives and does shopping for some Sisters and residents at Franciscan Village, and prepares the Breviary sheets for the Sisters' daily prayers.

Sister Nancy Streitmatter: knits beautiful baby sets and blankets for friends and relatives of the SSCs and regularly connects with Sisters who have health needs at Franciscan Village/Mother Theresa Home.

In addition to their ministry of leadership, these Sisters provide additional service to various groups:

Sister Immacula Wendt: active presence on the Strategy Team of SWOP (Southwest Organizing Project).

Sister Elizabeth Ann Yocius: connections with St. Casimir Academy/Maria High School Alumnae Association.

Sister Margaret Zalot: active presence on the Strategy Team of SWOP (Southwest Organizing Project).



Argentina:

Hna. (Sister) Joyce Ann Dopkin: collaborator at Our Lady of Luhan Chapel in Villa Tranquila, weekly meetings with post-confirmation group, participant in Mass on Sundays and Wednesdays in the Villa, helping to prepare the chapel for special celebrations, associate coordinator.



Hna. (Sister) Estela Riso: volunteer in Hogar Bethel (home for orphans) in Cordoba, in charge of chapel, liturgy, driving, and participates with other vocation directors in Cordoba.



Hna. (Sister) Asuncion Costantini: Ministry of Music at Madre de Misericordia Parish in Avellana, Eucharistic Minister for nursing homes, tutoring in her local convent.



Sisters gather for a group photo after a luncheon at Franciscan Village, Lemont, IL. From left, sitting: Sr. Elaine Kuizinas, Sr. Margaret Zalot, Sr. Immacula Wendt, Sister Elenisa Buzas, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, Sr. Lawrence Puisys, Sr. Lourdine Ramoska. Standing, from left: Sr. Nancy Streitmatter, Sr. Estela Riso, Sr. Bernadette Marie Janus, Sr. Virginia Gapsis, Sr. Sylvia Puchoras, Sr. Marilyn Karpovich, Sr. Asuncion Costantini, Sr. Margaret Petcavage, Sr. Rita Marie Kerdock, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Sr. Mary Louise Andrulonis, Sr. Deborah Romanuski, Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin and Sr. Janine Golubickis. (Photo by Karen Strabel)

Mother Maria Kaupas Center in Mount Carmel, PA



Sisters of St. Casimir visiting the Mother Maria Kaupas Center with three Mount Carmel, PA area residents attending a program on the life of Maria Kaupas. Front row, from left: Sisters Virginia Gaspis, Margaret Petcavage, and Rita Marie Kerdock. Back row, from left, Dr. Jeff Greco, Divine Redeemer parishioner; David Berezovske, president of the Mount Carmel Historical Society, and Suzanne Domzalski, Kaupas Center project manager.

Article submitted by Jake Betz

Jake is the Director of the Mother Maria Kaupas Center

The Mother Maria Kaupas Center in Mount Carmel, PA, has started a twice-monthly prayer group as a way to promote Mother Maria's cause for sainthood. "Back in 2015, we were so privileged to form our center for volunteerism in Mother Maria's honor," said Jake Betz, Mother Maria Kaupas Center director, "especially since her first public ministry, and that of the Sisters of Saint Casimir, was right here in our own town."

That first ministry occurred at the former Holy Cross Parish in Mount Carmel, PA, where the Sisters of Saint Casimir founded the first Catholic grade school in the United States for the children of Lithuanian immigrants. Holy Cross Church was one of five former parishes in Mount Carmel that merged in 1995 to form Divine Redeemer Church.

The Mother Maria Kaupas Center is a ministry of Divine Redeemer. The prayer group got off to an en-

thusiastic start in mid-October when Sister Margaret Petcavage, vice-postulator for the cause of Maria Kaupas' beatification, along with Sister Virginia Gaspis and Mount Carmel native Sister Rita Marie Kerdock, visited the MMK Center. The Sisters brought along reference materials from the Sisters of St. Casimir that chronicles Maria Kaupas' path from Lithuania to the United States. Sister Margaret was a featured speaker for a public program held at the Center on Maria Kaupas' life and legacy.

The prayer group meets at the Center on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, immediately following Daily Mass at the church, which is located a block and half down the street. "The reference materials the Sisters brought us are the source for reflections on the joys and challenges Mother Maria experienced in her life," Betz said.

Among the topics explored in prayer group discussions have been the Mother Maria's pilgrimage to a shrine to Our Lady in Vilnius, the

Sisters' preparation for and start of their ministry in Mount Carmel, the key role played by Father Anthony Staniukynas, the Sisters' spiritual adviser and the pastor of Holy Cross, and Maria Kaupas' record of always showing a particular concern for every one of the Sisters throughout her 27 years as General Superior. Quickly recognizing that Mother Maria's first concern was always the welfare of others, especially those with particular needs, members asked that the prayer group include a strong service component.

Outreach for the elderly and homebound and support for the Kaupas Center's community diaper program are among the first service projects. Betz added, "The more you learn about what Mother Maria experienced in her 60 years, the more you realize, no matter the challenges and obstacles she encountered, she accepted it all as God's will and used everything for His greater glory. She is an excellent model for anyone who wants to grow in holiness."

He Who Lit the Candle*

More about Father Anthony Staniukynas

The spring 1994 issue of *Journeys* featured Sister M. Agnesine Dering's article about the Father Anthony Staniukynas statue. The article reminds another generation about the history of the the Sisters of St. Casimir and the impact of Father A. Staniukynas.

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by: Sister M. Agnesine Dering

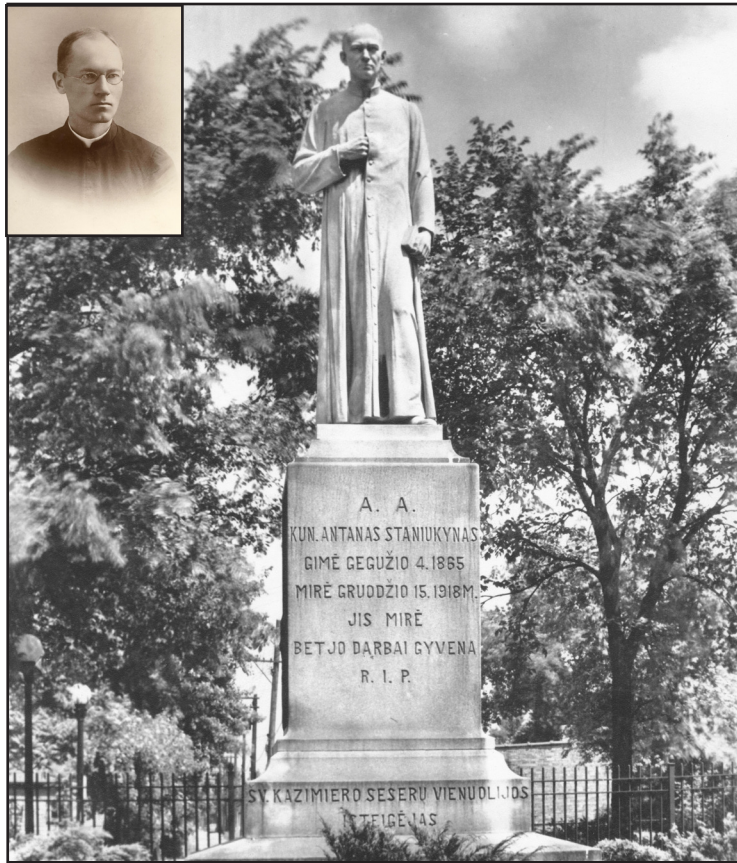
A question – somewhat out of the ordinary – is raised occasionally by visitors or passersby: “Why is the statue of the priest in the front of the main entrance of the Sisters of St. Casimir’s Motherhouse on Marquette Road facing backward?” Actually, it isn’t!

The statue depicts the reverend and saintly Rev. Dr. Anthony Staniukynas (1865-1918), co-founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir in whose early nurturing he played a dedicated and heroic role.

Released from his much-loved parish ministering, he devoted himself to becoming a beggar for alms to raise funds for the construction of a building to house the fledgling congregation of the Sisters. Up to the very last days of his life he remained a dedicated spiritual guide as well as an inspiring teacher of future educators and health care givers among the SSCs.

This year June 8 (1994) marks the 70th anniversary of the unveiling of the statue as well as the blessing of the cornerstone of the chapel of the SSCs. According to the DRAUGAS newspaper’s account of the event, the day had dawned unpromisingly after a night of heavy thunderstorms.

But by three o’clock on the afternoon, a vast crowd had gathered for the double ceremony: the unveiling



In memory of Rev. Anthony Staniukynas this monument was erected in 1924.

of the statue of Father Staniukynas and the blessing of the cornerstone of the chapel. American, Lithuanian and Papal flags waved in the welcome breezes and sunniness as the crowds awaited the unveiling of the statue. As the cloth draping fell from the statue the rays of the sun glanced off it, viewers beheld a dazzling white, life-likeness of Fr. Staniukynas. He appeared as if alive: modest, lean, his visage one of fatherly and serious concern. He faced the Motherhouse still concerned, as it were, with its future needs and its noble aspirations.

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The above is a reprint of a portion of the article.

Here is a Biographical sketch of the Rev. Dr. A. Staniukynas as given in the publication *The Founding of the Sisters of St. Casimir* edited by Sisters Marilyn Kuzmickus and Agnesine Dering:

Staniukynas, Antanas (1865-1918),

Roman Catholic priest, co-founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir, born in Saltininkai, in the parish of Krosna, county of Mariampole, in Lithuania on November 4, 1865. Ordained in 1889 after graduating from the Seinai Theological Seminary, he was assigned to a parish in the Polish region of Lomza far away from any centers of Lithuanian activity. In 1889 he received permission to go abroad for studies at Fribourg, Rome and Jerusalem; in the last city he was awarded a doctor of theology degree in 1901. On returning to Lithuania, he was shuttled from one parish to another, because of his intense participation in Lithuanian affairs, which was frowned upon by the Russian administration. In 1904 he emigrated

to the United States, where he worked in the parishes of Mt. Carmel and Shamokin, PA. In 1905 he agreed to take on the responsibility of the needs of the new Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir, then in the process of being founded. In addition to his monumental work for the Sisters of St. Casimir, he founded the American Lithuanian Priests’ Association and established the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Charities of America. He wrote numerous articles of the Lithuanian community press on religious and other topics; translated numerous religious texts into Lithuanian; prepared a series of readers for Lithuanian schools; published commentaries for a second Lithuanian edition of the New Testament. He died in Chicago on December 15, 1918. (pp. 126-127)

* Antanas Kucas, *Father Anthony Staniukynas*, 1965. From the “Introduction”.



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Save the date!

Saturday, August 26, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.

Founders' Day Mass

praying for the beatification of Mother Maria Kaupas

116th Anniversary of the SSC Founding

