



Journeys

SISTERS OF ST. CASIMIR

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Rooted in Love – Grown in Grace A New Journey Begins

The 2023 General Chapter of the Sisters of St. Casimir (SSC) took place at the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois, from May 22–26, 2023.

Sixteen SSC delegates and five members of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, (IHM), leadership team, gathered in our “Upper Room” waiting for our Pentecost. The peace and openness to the Spirit was truly felt by everyone as we prayed, discussed, and discerned the future of the Sisters of St. Casimir and elected new leaders. Blessings of love, trust and confidence graced us as we prayed our Chapter Prayer to the Holy Spirit and sang, “Walk with us, Mother Maria.”

We, the Sisters of St. Casimir, have been on a blessed twenty year journey preparing for this day.

In 1999, we began to see disturbing signs in our lives:

- The number of Sisters was diminishing, losing 12 Sisters each year (60 in five years),
- Our members were aging and becoming frail,
- Empty convents were closing, and we were leaving schools and ministries.

Together, we faced these challenges, as we continued to walk an unknown journey into the future with deep faith, trust, and determination, finding peace in our beloved Mother Maria’s words “*God loves us and nothing will happen to us without His knowledge. Persevere in His love.*”

(Continued on page 2)



Chapter discussions with sixteen Sisters of St. Casimir and five Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary leadership team led by Sr. Mary Hughes, OP, Chapter facilitator.



Sisters share with openness, respect, and peace to the blessing of the Spirit.

2023 Jubilarians Celebrate



*Sister Elenisa Buzas
75 years*



*Sister Theresa Dabulis
60 years
(Jubilee story on page 6)*

(Continued from cover story)

Miracles began to happen:

- We transferred Holy Cross Hospital to Sinai Health System. It remains a Catholic hospital, and our health care ministry continues, caring for more than one million people in this expanded market share. (2013)
- We sold Maria High School to Catalyst Charter Schools. *Catalyst Maria* is home to over 1,100 scholars, girls and boys, kindergarten to 12th grade providing values based excellence in academics, and appropriate discipline. (2012)
- We sold our Motherhouse to Catholic Charities. Today our mission of serving others continues through over 120 Catholic Charities employees who work at St. Casimir Center and daily go out to meet the needs of the people across the city. (2014)
- The Sisters moved to a Continuum of Care Facility at Franciscan Village in Lemont, Illinois, where they live, pray together, and share community life with one another. (2014)



Each delegate discerns the journey we must begin.

At this same time, the Sisters became more active in peace and justice issues through SWOP, the Southwest Organizing Project, feeding the people in our neighborhood at our St. Elizabeth Food Pantry, joining in peace and cease fire marches, going to Springfield, Illinois, to rally for changes to banking laws to stop predatory lending, to supporting immigration and housing issues.

Today, the Sisters of St. Casimir continue their ministry to serve others as ‘powerhouses’ of prayer and by their presence making a difference in the lives of the people they touch each day, making a difference in our world.

“How long can we remain as the Community we are today?”

The miracles continue:

The Sisters of St. Casimir were founded on August 29, 1907, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Our beloved foundress, Venerable Servant of God, Mother Maria Kaupas, and her two companions, Sister Immaculata and Sister Concepta received their religious formation under the tutelage of Mother Cyril Conway, IHM, and the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The IHM Sisters were our first Superiors, novice directors, and mentors, until the Sisters of St. Casimir had their First General Chapter in 1913, and elected Mother Maria as the first SSC General Superior. This bond and relationship have continued throughout all these years.



The work of the Holy Spirit continues. Chapter facilitator, Sr. Mary Hughes, OP, leads the discussion.

Around 2003, when we began to travel on our unknown Journey with the Spirit leading us, we faithfully prayed and remained steadfast in recognizing the needs and plans for our future. We asked ourselves many times: “How long can we remain as the Community we are today?” After many meetings and prayers, it became very clear that we, the Sisters of St. Casimir, would live our religious lives fully to the end. It was also very clear that we did not

want to merge or transfer to another Community. We wanted to remain Sisters of St. Casimir. The question was: how can this be done?

In 2009, the story of our desire to remain Sisters of St. Casimir was presented to Sister Mary Persico, IHM President. In the 2010 IHM General Chapter, our request to form a *Covenant relationship* with them was presented and it was unanimously approved. Throughout these years the bonds and relationships have deepened and grown. The IHMs have continued to walk with us each step of the way of our journey since 2010, providing us support and love, respectful of our decision to remain Sisters of St. Casimir.

In 2018, a formal *Covenant agreement and plan* was signed by members of both Communities. This is our ‘last will’ document and will formally be acted upon when we can no longer provide delegates for a Chapter or Sisters for Leadership.

As the sixteen delegates of the 2023 General Chapter began to discuss what will be the next plans for our future, it became evident that it is the time to freely ratify moving forward with this ‘last will’ *Covenant agreement*.

We have 30 members today. We lost 22 Sisters in the last five years. Our median age is 85. It is predicted that in the next five years, we will have less than 20 members. It is time to take the step of requesting Rome to appoint a Pontifical Commissary (a leader being sent to govern) to oversee our needs to care for our Sisters and to govern the business of the Community. This was approved by the delegates.

We have requested Rome that this be an IHM Sister. There will also be two SSCs appointed as members of the Commissary’s advisory team.



Sisters of St. Casimir Transitional Leadership Team 2023, from left: Sr. Immacula Wendt, General Superior, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, Councilor, and Sr. Ellen Maroney, IHM, Advisor.

Preparations and celebrations for this next part of our journey will take place within the next fifteen months led by a Transitional Leadership Team – two members of the SSCs and one IHM who will be an advisor.

The delegates voted that Sister Immacula Wendt will be the General Superior and Sister Elizabeth Ann Yocius, will be the Councilor. The IHM advisor will be determined at a later date.

(Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM has been named for this position.) This decision to be governed by a Pontifical Commissary by the Chapter will begin on August 29, 2024.

As we, the Sisters of St. Casimir, look back over these past 116 years, we can’t help but be filled with gratitude to God for we have been so deeply “Rooted in Love.” We can’t

So deeply “Rooted in Love and Grown in God’s Grace!” Miracles never cease.

help but ponder, why? Why are we SSCs and IHMs continuing to experience this deepening special bond of love our two communities have today? This, we attribute to firmly believing that our Mother Maria, SSC and Mother Cyril, IHM, continue to orchestrate the lives of our two Communities. We need only to remember that Mother M. Gabriel Donnelly, IHM was appointed our first General Superior until Mother Maria was elected General Superior in 1913.

Today, we come full circle, when an IHM will be appointed Pontifical Commissary in 2024 to lead and care for the Sisters of St. Casimir. Our Communities truly have “Grown in Grace,” a gift freely given by God, for which we are grateful!

*And the miracles never cease as we continue to be:
“Rooted in Love and Grown in God’s Grace!”*

Sister Immacula Wendt, S.S.C.

Sister Immacula Wendt,
General Superior

2023 SSC General Chapter Voices

CHAPTER 2023 PRAYER

Let us form a single unity in God's love
and God will be a visible bond
of strength uniting us.
Mother Maria Kaupas



O Holy Spirit of God, abide with us;
inspire all our thoughts;
pervade our imaginations;
suggest all our decisions;
order all our doings.
Be with us in our silence
and in our speech, in our haste
and in our leisure, in company
and in solitude, in the freshness
of the morning and in the
weariness of the evening;
and give us grace
at all times humbly
to rejoice in your
mysterious companionship.
Amen.



*Sr. Nancy
Streitmatter*



*Sr. Margaret
Zalot*



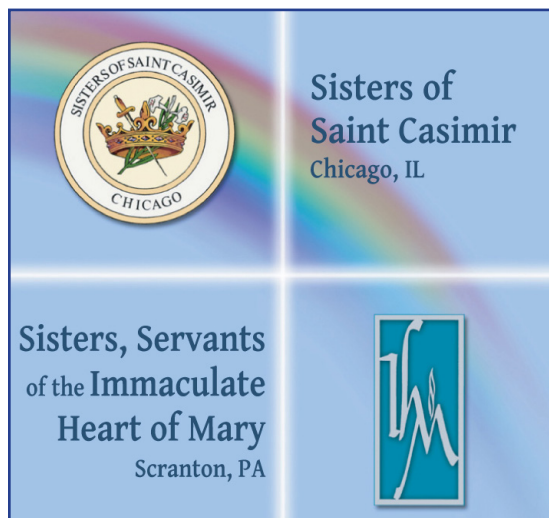
*Sr. Elizabeth Ann
Yocius*



*Sr. Bernadette Marie
Janus*

This Chapter was peaceful. The pre-chapter Zoom meetings helped us face the inevitable. It is consoling to know that we continue to be Sisters of St. Casimir and that our "big sisters" the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, continue to walk with us and support us.

The fact that our youngest Sister just turned 70, the majority of us are in our 80s and many have health challenges, we still can and do serve God's people in many ways. Our mission of making God's love present as Sisters of St. Casimir, daughters of Mother Maria Kaupas can go on for 20 or 30 years if that pleases God. Please continue to walk with us.



Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin



Sr. Estela Risso

We worked on this Chapter via Zoom meetings. Each meeting was prayerful and filled with joy in preparation for the General Chapter. Our facilitator Sister Mary Hughes, OP, patiently helped us with her spirit of joy and calm. Many people supported the delegates by praying.

The Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM Sisters) attended with the listening and love that each one showed us.

The best part of the Chapter was the in-person participation and spirituality of the Sisters. Technology assistance provided added to our understanding and joy.

As a Sister from Argentina, I had the privilege of being accompanied by a translator.

The entire development of the Chapter and the happy moments together with the grateful memories on this path were made by the grace of God and the spirit of Mother Maria Kaupas who continues to walk with us.

Rooted in Love and Grown in Grace. I strive to live this motto as a Sister, and as Sister Immacula reminds us the "miracle continues."

It is an honor to be a Sister of St. Casimir from Argentina and to know the Sisters since childhood. It was a thrill to see the Legacy Room of the Sisters of St. Casimir at the former Motherhouse.



From left: Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin, Sr. Asuncion Costantini, and Sr. Estela Risso lead the singing at the prayer service.



At left: Sr. Rita Marie Kerdock observes as Sr. Janine Golubickis enthusiastically shares her thoughts.

2023 SSC General Chapter Mass



Father Joe McCormick, OSA, celebrant blesses the Sisters.



Sisters extend their hands in blessing the delegates.



IHM Leadership Team, from left: Sr. Grace Surdovel, Sr. Susan Armbruster, Sr. Terri Jordan, Sr. Judy O'Brien and Sr. Katie Clauss



From left: musicians Gia Martin and Anna Belle O'Shea

Jubilee 2023

Sister Elenisa Buzas Celebrates 75 Years



Sr. Immacula Wendt pins a corsage on Jubilarian Sr. Elenisa Buzas.



Celebrants of the Jubilee Mass, Fr. Tony Pizzo, OSA and Fr. Bob Lucas, CM.



Cantor and organist Gia Martin sings "Come, Thou Chosen of the Lord," as flutist Anna Belle O'Shea provides accompaniment.



Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin (on left), and Sr. Asuncion Costantini congratulate Sr. Elenisa Buzas.



Sisters from Argentina sing "Salve, Maria" for the Communion reflection. From left: Sr. Estela Rizzo, Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin and Sr. Asuncion Costantini.

by Sister Elizabeth Ann Yocius

A Eucharistic Liturgy of Thanksgiving was celebrated by Father Tony Pizzo, OSA, in the Chapel at Franciscan Village on Saturday, May 27, 2023, thanking God for the 75 years of religious profession of Sister Elenisa Buzas.

Gia Martin added to our celebration as cantor and organist and was accompanied by Anna Belle O'Shea who played the flute. This Diamond Jubilee celebration was especially joyful because our three Sisters who are missioned in Argentina: Sister Joyce Ann Dopkin, Sister Estela Rizzo, and Sister Asuncion Costantini, celebrated in person instead of by livestream because they were present at our Chapter the week before.

Sister Elenisa, a native Argentine, and the first Sister of St. Casimir from

Argentina, had lived and worked in Argentina with these Sisters for many years before she moved to Franciscan Village in 2019. So their presence at Mass and the luncheon was especially meaningful. They also brought greetings from many of the people who Sister Elenisa worked with during her years in Argentina.

This Diamond Jubilee celebrated 75 years of prayer, community, and ministry, of Sister Elenisa as a Sister of St. Casimir. Sister Elenisa taught primary grades, English, Religion, and Confirmation classes and was a principal in Argentina. She is also able to teach Spanish grammar, literature, Latin, and geography in high school and junior college. Sister Elenisa ministered with the mothers' monthly meetings for first to third graders. She cooked,

attended Liturgy meetings, visited poor people to assess their needs, was a Eucharistic Minister and visited people.

She took care of the garden and has beautiful plants in her apartment. Each week, in the convent basement, Sister Elenisa met with a group of women who met to mend used clothes and share faith-filled stories and experiences.

Sister Elenisa crochets beautiful afghans, baby blankets, scarves, and lap blankets to share with the poor. She has the various patterns memorized and makes crocheting look very easy. Sister's work is beautiful and truly a work of love. Sister Elenisa's ministry at Franciscan Village, in addition to crocheting, is that of prayer and presence.

Jubilarian Reflection



Sr. Elenisa Buzas

God has been my friend who has blessed me all my life with friends, my vocation, the people I have touched and those who have touched me. I in turn have been moved with the desire to do something for God.

During my entire life the presence of God has been most important to me. I am living every day in the presence of God. As a principal in Argetnina at my monthly meetings with parents, I would report on school events and then in the religious part, I would include the blessings of God's presence in each of our lives. I was so pleased when some of the parents remembered this when I retired from the school.

The celebration of my Jubilee was a great blessing in my life. I thank God, my Sisters, and friends who made it so special, and I am especially grateful to celebrate together with my Sisters from Argentina.



From left: Sr. Estela Risso, Sr. Asuncion Costantini, Sr. Elenisa Buzas and Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin. All four Sisters ministered in Argentina. Sr. Elenisa currently lives at Franciscan Village.



Sr. Margaret Petcavage carries the Book of Gospels at the Jubilee Mass procession.



Sr. Elenisa Buzas waves and thanks to those gathered at the Jubilee Mass. Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin escorts Sr. Elenisa, followed by Sr. Asuncion Costantini, and Sr. Estela Risso.



Father Tony Pizzo, OSA inspires the Sisters during the homily. From left: Sr. Margaret Petcavage, Karen Strabel, Sr. Lenore Thomas, IHM, Sr. Marilyn Karpovich. Front row, from left: Sr. Elenisa Buzas, Sr. Joyce Ann Dopkin, Sr. Asuncion Costantini, Sr. Estela Risso, Sr. Immacula Wendt, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, and Sr. Margaret Zalot.

Jubilee 2023

Sister Theresa Dabulis Celebrates 60 Years



Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius and Sr. Immacula Wendt present a Jubilee gardenia corsage to Sr. Theresa Dabulis.

by Sister Elizabeth Ann Yocius

Jubilee joy filled the Franciscan Village Chapel on Saturday, August 12, as Sisters, family, and friends gathered to pray during the Eucharistic Liturgy and the Renewal of Vows of Sister Theresa Dabulis, our Theresa of Brooklyn. Augustinian Father Ray Flores was the celebrant and Vincentian Father Bob Lucas, was the concelebrant. Gia Martin shared her musical gifts as cantor and organist, while Anna Belle



Cousins gather at the banquet with Sr. Theresa. From left: Mary Ann Vastunas-Roe, Jeanine Bachtel, and Theresa Jones.



Father Ray Flores, OSA, asks questions during the Jubilee Mass.



Sr. Theresa celebrates at the banquet. From left: Sr. Lawrence Puishys, Sr. Sylvia Puchoras, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Sr. Margaret Zalot, and Sr. Deborah Romanuski.

O'Shea played flute.

A Jubilee luncheon took place following the Mass and guests were greeted with music by the Marimba band from Holy Cross-IHM Parish in the Town of Lake neighborhood in Chicago. As soon as our Jubilarian, Sister Theresa, heard the music, her dancing feet got her up on the floor even before the luncheon was served.

It was wonderful to see many people join in the dancing, and even more after eating! In fact, Sister Theresa, pushing Sister Dolorine in her wheelchair, to the beat of the music, led the group, in a train formation, around the tables and chairs, into the annex

and back around to the main dining room. Guests enjoyed watching the dancers having fun and no one wanted to leave.

What a beautiful tribute to Sister Theresa's 60 years of prayer, community, and joyful service, touching the minds and hearts of all the people she ministered to in various ways. Her smile, gentleness, ability to listen and connect with people were visible during her Jubilee celebration, just as it has been throughout these many years. Dancing Dabulis, Sister Theresa, delighted everyone with her Jubilee joy that is still visible to this day!



Enjoying the Jubilee joy, from left: Katie Estes, Kirby Campbell, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Linda Campbell, Mackenzie Campbell and Connor Kennedy.

Jubilarian Reflection



Sr. Theresa Dabulis

*Always more, always better, always with love.
Mother Maria Kaupas*

As I reflected on my Jubilee, the diamond came to mind. Why is the diamond the image for 60 years? A diamond, in its entirety, is a sparkling miraculous mix of facets. As I reflected on the facets of my 60 years they include my family, close friends, community and ministries.

My family taught me valuable lessons of faith, forgiveness, acceptance of others, and love for God which carried me through my entire life.

My religious life is where I learned how to be a woman religious through many Sisters who shared their spirituality, knowledge, and their passion and caring for the poor and marginalized, and Mother Earth. These women shared their talents to further the mission of the Church and the world. They inspired me to be better.

Many of these Sisters have gone to God and are now part of the cloud of witnesses that continue to support me. One in particular comes to mind on my Jubilee day—Sister Regina Marie Dubickas, former General Superior, who battled cancer for six years. She always spoke hope, and her letters to her Sisters were always filled with a light that came from her trust and deep love of God. She was truly an inspiration to whom-ever she encountered. She died as she lived—gracefully.

My ministry in education included primary grades and high school. One of my former first grade students, Jonathan, came to my Jubilee with his family. God's ways of connecting people are



Sr. Theresa poses with Sr. Immacula Wendt, General Superior, and Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, Councilor for the official Jubilee photo.



Sr. Theresa celebrates with first grade pupil, Jonathon Heil, and his family.

mysterious and wonderful!

When I moved into parish work as a Director of Religious Education, faith formation was a priority, and one which entailed working with adults interested in becoming Catholic. One such family, I encountered during this time were the Campbells who came to my Jubilee celebration. God's ways are mysterious!

In my later years, as a social worker, I worked with abused and neglected children. These children taught me lessons which touched me to the core.

From Social Work I was called into leadership in my SSC Community. I am presently living at Franciscan Village in Lemont, IL and ministering by being present to those I meet each day. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, God always gives us opportunities to minister.

My heart was filled with joy, and gratitude as I anticipated my Jubilee. The excitement of family and friends arriving from all over the country was amazing. My heart was bursting with joy!

On the morning of the Jubilee it is customary to have a corsage pinned to the lapel of the Jubilarian. Sister Immacula and Sister Elizabeth Ann presented me with a gardenia. The gardenia was my mother's favorite flower. The flowers on the altar were representing my two sisters who are with God.

The prelude to the mass began with a Lithuanian instrumental, played in honor of our Blessed Mother and in memory of my mother who gifted me with life and faith.

The liturgy opened with the hymn, "Join in the dance of the Earth's jubilation! This is the feast of the love of God. Shout from the heights to the ends of creation: Jesus the Savior is risen from the grave." I could feel the presence of the Holy One among the people present. It was spectacular in its simplicity and beautifully moving!

Dinner was a special time for sharing with family and friends. Then the Marimba band had the people on their feet, filled with joy of the music and the dance. The expressions on the people's faces were amazing. I danced with Sister Dolorine, in her wheelchair, who was in her glory as she waved with glee to the audience.

This was a truly sparkling diamond jubilee!

This reflection helped me to appreciate the goodness, faithfulness, and love God has for me and the people I met on my journey of life so far. I pray that I may reflect a tiny facet of God's goodness and love to all those I meet.



Jubilee joy at the banquet, from left: Sr. Virginia Gapsis, Sr. Elenisa Buzas, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, and Sr. Rita Marie Kerdock.

Founders' Day 2023

Founders' Day 2023 was celebrated on August 26th with about 100 people attending. Father Ken Baker was celebrant for the Mass held at St. Casimir Center Chapel, commemorating the 116th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of St. Casimir. Father Ken Baker assisted by Deacon Joe Panek, shared thoughts about the questions the Sisters of St. Casimir were asking 20 years ago at Chapter.

(Thoughts from Father Ken's homily.)

As you continue your discernment and look to the future, as you celebrate your 116 years of service to the Church, and the hopeful beatification of your beloved Mother Maria, you have written this about yourselves: *Wherever the Sisters of St. Casimir have gone, and whatever work they have done, they have witnessed to God's presence in the world, and the value of the Gospel above all treasures.*



The Transitional Leadership Team recites the acceptance to the call to serve during the blessing. From left: Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, Sr. Ellen Maroney, IHM, Sr. Immacula Wendt.



Anna Belle O'Shea leads the singing at Founders' Day Mass.

In the little book called *Loving You, Mother Maria*, do you know how many times the word *love* appears in her writings? There are nearly no quotes in this little book that do not include the word *love*. This was her starting point. *Love* one another. How was that *love* poured out? In simple ways and in extraordinary ways at other times. But always it seems, by being in the moment.



Father Ken Baker reads from "Loving You, Mother Maria" booklet.



Sr. Immacula Wendt (right) leads the blessing of Sr. Eleace King, IHM, SSC pastoral visitor at Franciscan Village.



Sisters extend their right hand to pray over the Transitional Leadership Team during the blessing.

Founders' Day 2023

God chose you, the Sisters of St. Casimir, to be in the moment: in Scranton and Chicago; in Nebraska and New Mexico; in Lithuania and Argentina; through World War II and communist domination to living and working underground...in schools and hospitals and parishes, learning new languages and cultures.

As Mother Maria wrote: *No matter where you live – whether it be in places surrounded by calm, peaceful nature, or in modest homes buried among city buildings in the midst of noise and turbulence, I visualize you all traveling together as a community of faith... And how ardently I wish that our Heavenly Father and his angels and saints might see us selflessly helping one another with love and zeal.*

And Sisters, I believe that every time in these past 116 years you and your community have been in the moment, bringing love, you have been planting seeds so it is the fruit that remains. And The history, the journey and the legacy are what we are here to celebrate today.

I suspect that there are those here who are signs of the fruits of your labor and your love and are here to thank God for you being in their moments.

And Mother Maria, who invited you to say *Yes* to God's choice of you, has this to say, especially on this day of Blessing of the Transitional Leadership Team, Missioning of the Sisters and Associates, and celebrating a relationship which was there from the start between the Sisters of St. Casimir and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters: *Jesus, our friend loves noble souls who are prepared always to begin anew; always ready to forge ahead.* May God Bless the Sisters of St. Casimir!

A celebration followed the liturgy at St. Casimir Center dining room where refreshments and coffee were served. Many visited the Legacy Room.

The Sisters are grateful for all who support them and are deeply touched by stories about the the impact of the Sisters of St. Casimir on their lives.



SSC Associates gather after Mass in the Legacy Room for a group photo. From left: Loretta Ezerski, Ginger Madden, Mary Ann Dusza, Diane Dzielak, Joanie Mullen, Linda Penkas, Sr. Immacula Wendt, Paul Binkis and Susan Binkis.



Sisters and friends celebrate after Mass. From left: Grazina Santoski, Sr. Immacula Wendt, Sr. Janine Golubickis, Billy Mitchell, and Deborah Wagner. Sitting, from left: Sr. Lourdine Ramoska, Sr. Dolorine Lopez.

At Journey's End — *Eternal Days Beginning*

Sister Grace Ann Kalafut, SSC

SEPTEMBER 18, 1935 – AUGUST 24, 2023



Grace Ann Kalafut was born September 18, 1935, to George and Estelle Rusin Kalafut in Chicago, Illinois. Grace Ann was the oldest of four children. She began her education at St. Simon Elementary School and then St. Rita Elementary School before enrolling at St. Casimir Academy.

On her Golden Jubilee Sister Grace Ann wrote: "Through the influence of the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius (St. Simon Parish) in my early life and the Sisters of St. Casimir in my high school years (St. Casimir Academy/Maria High School), I became attracted to religious life as a calling to serve God. Little did I know, as I entered religious life in my senior year of high school, that my life would unfold in the many wonderful ways in which it has, more so than I could have ever planned for myself."

Grace Ann attended St. Casimir Academy when it transitioned into Maria High School and was therefore part of the first graduating class in 1953. During her senior year, inspired and influenced by the many women religious who had touched her life, Grace Ann entered the Sisters of St. Casimir as a postulant. Grace Ann continued preparing to become a Sister of St. Casimir, taking the name Sister M. Patrick and making her first vows in 1955. She also pursued studies to prepare herself for her lifelong ministries in education, eventually earning a B.S. in Education from Marywood College in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and an M.A. in Education from Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. Later, she also received a Religious Education Certificate from Mundelein College in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1956 Sister Grace Ann began her ministry and service within the church as an educator. Her ministry took her to six states: Illinois, New Mexico, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. For 18 years, she taught in the primary grades. Over time, she added administrative duties to her education ministry. In 1967 she became principal of Our Lady of Vilna School in Chicago while teaching grades 3 and 4. In 1974 she became principal of Saints Peter and Paul School in the West Pullman area of Chicago. In 1980 she took her talents to the congregation's high schools. At Villa Joseph Marie High School in Holland, Pennsylvania, she taught religion until she became assistant principal 1982-1983.

In 1983 she returned to Chicago to become assistant principal of Maria High School. From 1985 to 1991 she served as principal of Maria High School. In 1991 she returned to Villa Joseph Marie as assistant principal and teacher.

In 1993 she returned home to Chicago, bringing her administrative skills back to the congregation. She was elected to Congregational Leadership, serving first as Councilor and then as General Treasurer.

Her life's path introduced her to new experiences and cultures even as it exposed her to the poverty and the difficulties that so many people she served endured. Still, she willingly followed God and found joy in doing His work.

Continuing her golden jubilee reflection, she wrote: "Throughout these years, I have been called to minister in situations that challenged me to go beyond my own beginnings and what was familiar to me and come to know and be enriched by the African American and Hispanic cultures in the neighborhoods I served. I continue to reach out and serve the needs of the poor in the area around our Motherhouse through my work in the food pantry. I always felt that God was directing my life, and everything was a special blessing from God."

Sister Grace Ann, went the extra mile in Mexican and Black communities, dedicating her life to help end racial discrimination and to advance the interests of minority schools by helping revise policy, curriculum, and teacher training. She also worked to improve life in the Marquette Park community by participating in the activities of SWOP (Southwest Organizing Project) to address issues challenging the neighborhoods around the Motherhouse. She volunteered regularly at the SSC Food Pantry and recruited additional volunteers, including her sister Vern and nephew George. In addition, she assisted and chaired the SSC annual Summerfest and Founders' Day festivals. She was a Summerfest dynamo!

Sister Grace Ann loved life. Her family was her greatest treasure. She was so proud of her nieces and nephews and their families, and often talked about what everyone was doing. She was a great sports fan, cheering her Chicago White Sox, Blackhawks, Bears, and Bulls to victory.

Sister Grace Ann was actively involved with several organizations and committees, sharing her time, talent, and enthusiasm. Some of these include: ITRI (Illinois Treasurers of Religious Institutes), NRRO (National Religious Retirement Office), Parish Cluster, congregational planning committees, and Motherhouse liturgy committee.

Sister Grace Ann also had the opportunity to travel outside the country and connect with our Congregational roots in Lithuania and our Congregational mission in Argentina. She also travelled to Slovakia to connect with her personal roots.



Personal remembrances:

*To Sr. Grace Ann's community and family,
I join you in thanking God for the gift of Sr. Grace Ann's
life and ministry as a Sister of St. Casimir. She was blessed
with a long life and helped steward the gifts of God for her
community and the many lives she touched. May she now
experience the fullness of God's Life and Love which is
Heaven! I join in prayer for her eternal happiness and
pray for an increase of religious vocations.*

Fr. John Schork, CP

Provincial Treasurer

The Passionists of Holy Cross Province, Park Ridge, IL (a member of ITRI).

*My deepest condolences to the Sisters of St. Casimir on the
loss of Sister Grace Ann. I remember working closely with
Sister at bake sales and enjoyed seeing her at Saturday
Masses (coffee and breads). May the choirs of angels come
to greet her and lead her into paradise.*

Elizabeth Pienta

Friend of Sister Grace Ann

*Sister Grace Ann was truly a wonderful and devoted
member of your community. She was a great teacher,
and I truly appreciated her guidance and support over
the years. I know she was welcomed into heaven with
open arms!! May she rest in peace.*

Anita Alvarez

Anita is a former student of Sister Grace Ann Kalafut at Our Lady of Vilna School in Chicago, and former Cook County State's Attorney.

Sister Grace Ann lived her life in a spirit of trust in God's love for her. This unquestioning trust is expressed in a quote by St. Frances De Sales, a quote she used to end her reflection on her 60th diamond jubilee:

"Do not fear what will happen tomorrow. The same loving Father who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and every day."

We are grateful to God for Sister Grace Ann and the many talents God gave her. May she now enjoy the fullness of life and peace in God's presence forever.



From left: Sr. Margaret Petcavage, Sr. Virginia Gapsis, Sr. Rita Marie Kerdock, Sr. Grace Ann Kalafut, and Sr. Lourdine Ramoska with Fr. Andrew Liaugminas after a Mother Maria Mass.



From left: Sr. Immacula Wendt, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Sr. Regina Dubickas, and Sr. Grace Ann Kalafut in Lithuania.



From left: Sr. Immacula Wendt, Sr. Regina Dubickas, Anita Alvarez, Sr. Grace Ann Kalafut, Wendy Lynn, Sr. Margaret Zalot and Nannette Zander.

At Journey's End — *Eternal Days Beginning*

Sister Zita Petkevicius, SSC

DECEMBER 24, 1928 – JUNE 14, 2023



Sister Zita (Aldona Petkevicius) was born to John Petkevicius and Sally Smigelskaite Petkeviciene on December 24, 1928, in Kaugonys, Lithuania. She was one of seven children.

One of the happiest days for her was the day in 1990 she heard that Lithuania was free, something for which she had been praying for many years. The last time she saw Lithuania was in 1940 when she was twelve years old. At that time, the Nazis came into her home, having just shot and killed her father in a wheat field in her backyard, and took her with them and shipped her to a German prison camp, leaving behind her 3 year old sister Ona and her 5 year old brother Jonas. Her mother and grandmother were not at home at the time. She never saw her family again. Later, the Nazis also imprisoned and killed her mother, two other brothers and a twin sister.

Yet Sister Zita (Aldona) was strong. She escaped from the prison camp on a day when the soldiers were executing a group of prisoners. She dug a hole with her fingers and crawled under a barbed-wire fence, badly scratching her back. Bleeding, she ran through the woods, went through a long sewer pipe and emerged in the woods again. This time she was found by two German sisters who were picking berries and mushrooms. These two women, bathed, clothed, fed, and hid her. She lived with them for thirteen years until she came to the United States (Columbus, Ohio) in 1956 and eventually to the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Casimir on January 5, 1957.

On August 15, 1959, Sister Zita made her first vows. She was soon missioned to St. Francis Convent in Indiana Harbor, Indiana, to use her dietary skills in providing meals for the Sisters teaching in the school. Sister Zita continued ministering in dietary services in various convents, including the Motherhouse where she also made hosts.

Her ministries took her to Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania. She especially enjoyed her time at Villa Joseph Marie and St. Joseph Home for the Aged from 1987-2009. Her ministry was sewing for the residents of the Home, but she also assisted Sister Elaine, principal at Villa Joseph Marie, ensuring doors in the school were locked and all lights were out after weekend and evening events. Of course, she enjoyed the spacious and beautiful grounds

and opportunities at the Villa, including the apple orchards for apple picking, the swimming pool for refreshing breaks on hot days, the table in the community room for playing (and mostly winning) games of checkers, and her computer for mastering a few computer games.

In 2009, Sister Zita returned to the Motherhouse to celebrate her Golden Jubilee and to live in the Motherhouse community. She reflected on her life experiences and wrote about them in *Journeys*, the SSC Newsletter: "What I experienced after I was taken to Germany, especially the loss of my family and my home, was very painful and I commend it all to God who knows and understands everything. I came to the United States in 1956 and sought out the Sisters of St. Casimir who welcomed me into their community."

Since 2014 she served as a minister of prayer and presence at Franciscan Village in Lemont, Illinois. For her 60th Jubilee celebration she wrote: "I thank God for protecting me and guiding me to a new life in my vocation. I also thank God for my religious community and for all the blessings that have come to me through them."



Sr. Zita on right with Sr. Alfreda at Villa Joseph Marie High School in Pennsylvania shining apples for Christmas gifts.



At Journey's End — *Eternal Days Beginning*

Sister M. June Puishys, SSC

DECEMBER 28, 1928 - JUNE 7, 2023



Peter and Anna (Ackalitis) Puishys welcomed Helen Marie (Sister M. June) into their family on December 28, 1928, in Worcester, Massachusetts. She was the third born of seven children. She was baptized, made her first communion, and was confirmed in St. Casimir Church and attended St. Casimir School

where she was taught by the Sisters of St. Casimir. She grew up with an older brother, Joseph, an older sister Dorothy, and four younger siblings: Anne (Sister Mary Lawrence), Mary June, Robert, and William.

Her sister Anne left home for the convent in Chicago in 1950 where she was soon to become Sister Mary Lawrence. Helen Marie, at the time had no interest in becoming a “nun” rather she desired to become a nurse. After completing her high school education at Commerce High, she attended Memorial Hospital School of Nursing and received her degree as registered nurse (RN) – on the way to achieving her goal of becoming a nurse. She began working as a nurse at two Veteran Administration Hospitals in Massachusetts, but God had other plans for her. She began seeing convent life from a different perspective and the seeds of her vocation were planted. So, at the age of twenty-seven, having spent time in prayer and discernment, she concluded that God was calling her to a life of prayer and service to God and God’s people. She left home, with her nursing training behind her and some nursing experience, to enter the Sisters of St. Casimir at their Motherhouse in Chicago on January 6, 1956.

On August 15, 1958 Sister M. June made her first vows. Her life of ministry and service within the community began. After spending her first year of ministry serving the health needs of the Sisters at the Motherhouse as part-time infirmarian, she began studying at DePaul University and in 1966 she completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In 1959 she was asked to serve as a nurse at Holy Cross Hospital where she remained until 1993.

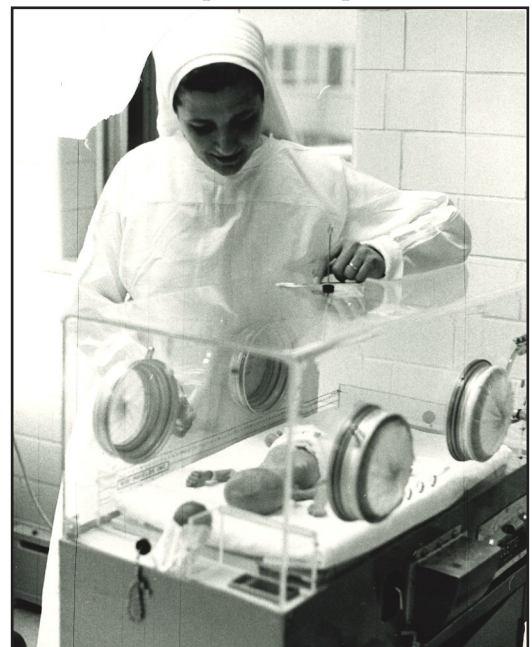
At Holy Cross Hospital, Sister M. June began working in the obstetrics department, lovingly caring for many newborn babies and their mothers. As she mentioned in her golden jubilee reflection: “It was such a joy to care for and nourish tiny infants and watch them grow and mature enough to be discharged home, after spending weeks, sometimes months under our care.” She remained in contact throughout the years with many babies she

cared for in the nursery. In fact, two of her former “preemies” that she cared for in the Newborn Premature Nursery were present to celebrate her golden jubilee of religious profession in 2008.

In 1985 Sister M. June became the Assistant Director of Nursing Services. In 1988 she became the Director of Outpatient Services. From the Fall of 1992 until the end of 1993 she worked in Infection Control. Throughout her years at Holy Cross Hospital, Sister M. June formed lasting relationships with her patients and their families as well as her co-workers.

Before moving to the Motherhouse in 1995, she took a one-year sabbatical, getting much-needed rest and space for prayer and reflection. At the Motherhouse she served in the finance office, doing payroll at first, then adding human resources. While at the Motherhouse, Sister M. June and her friend, Sister Angeline, had the opportunity to connect with nature, including the birds, the squirrels, even a stray dog. She made sure they were all well-fed and were kept safe. Once a few goslings hatched on the roof and learned to fly off the roof. Sister M. June escorted the parent geese and their goslings to Marquette Park, so they could arrive safely. Of course, she had plenty of practice with birds. She kept two parakeets in her room, allowing the birds to live well by eating and flying freely as she enjoyed their presence.

In 2014 Sister M. June moved from the Motherhouse to Franciscan Village in Lemont, Illinois, where she continued her ministry of prayer and presence.



Sr. M. June served at Holy Cross Hospital for 34 years. Many of those years were caring for the newborn babies in the Nursery.

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Save the date!

Saturday, November 4, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.

Mother Maria Mass

praying for the beatification of Mother Maria Kaupas

at St. Casimir Center Chapel

2601 W. Marquette Road

Chicago, IL 60629

