



Journeys

SISTERS OF ST. CASIMIR

Vol. XXXVIII No. 1
Spring 2024

Sinai Chicago - Holy Cross Hospital Celebrate the Sisters of St. Casimir



Sr. Immacula Wendt, SSC expresses gratitude to the guests and Sisters gathered at Sinai Chicago / Holy Cross Hospital for a reception on February 16, 2024 in the Hospital Auditorium. The Sisters of St. Casimir were recognized and honored for nearly a century of ministry and service at Holy Cross Hospital. Sr. Immacula Wendt was recognized for her leadership and faithful service. From left: Sr. Nancy Streitmatter, Sr. Ellen Maroney, IHM, Sr. Margaret Zalot, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, Sr. Margaret Petcavage, Sr. Immacula Wendt, Sr. Deborah Romanuski, Sr. Virginia Gapsis, Sr. Rita Marie Kerdock, Sr. Theresa Papsis, Sr. Bernadette Marie Janus, Sr. Janine Golubickis, Sr. Eleace King, IHM, and Sr. Marilyn Karpovich.

*by Dennis Ryan
Sinai Chicago Vice President of Mission*

As the Sisters of St. Casimir transition to a new relationship with the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, (IHM's in Scranton, PA) it seemed like a superb time to celebrate over one hundred years of ministry that Venerable Servant of God Maria Kaupas and a fledgling group of women religious began in starting the congregation.

From education, health care, social services, missionary work, and community support, the Sisters have demonstrated responsiveness, commitment, and creativity in ways that are immeasurable. Sinai Chicago reached out to leaders of the Archdiocese of Chicago, elected officials, institutional leaders, and the community to celebrate the Sisters of St. Casimir legacy and the leadership that Sister Immacula Wendt has provided for decades.

The response was unanimously positive and a celebration of the Sisters' legacy was held at Holy Cross Hospital on February 16th. Led by Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Sinai Chicago

President and CEO, over 80 leaders joined Sister Immacula and many of the Sisters of St. Casimir.

The celebration began with an invocation by Bishop Dan Turley, OSA. He then read congratulations from Cardinal Blaise Cupich and the Vicar of health care, Father William Grogan. In the letter, Cardinal Cupich praised the Sisters for their exemplary dedication, faithfulness, and the broad range of ministries that they have provided.

Dr. Jeen-Soo Chang, President and Chief Medical Officer of Holy Cross Hospital reflected on the importance of the Sisters' health care ministry and willingness to take on challenges, and he praised the leadership that Sister Immacula provided on the Boards of Holy Cross Hospital and Sinai Chicago. Dennis Ryan, Sinai Chicago Vice President of Mission, described the invaluable example that the Sisters have built in support of education, health care, community leadership, and social justice.

Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter and State Senator Willie Preston shared an Illinois Proclamation in honor of the Sisters. Senator Mattie Hunter shared her personal

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Celebrating the Sisters of St. Casimir at Holy Cross Hospital



Distinguished guests gather for a group photo. From left: Dr. Jeen-Soo Chang, Clarisol Duque, Alia Bilal, Jeff Bartow, Fr. Tony Pizzo, OSA, Sr. Immacula Wendt, Dr. Ngozi Ezike, State Senator Mattie Hunter, Patrick Cocchiore, State Senator Willie Preston, Dr. Wayne Lerner.

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joy in having been the Sisters' advocate and friend. She said that she considered the Sisters "her girls" and always appreciated their example of faith-filled service. Senator Willie Preston and his wife, Brittany described how much she valued her education at Maria High School.

United States Senator Dick Durbin's State Director, Clarisol Duque, read a letter from Senator Durbin in which he personally praised the Sisters for their tremendous contributions and being examples of community leadership. Clarisol praised the daily support that her education by Catholic Sisters has given her.

Father Tony Pizzo, the Midwest Prior Provincial of the Augustinians, spoke of the high esteem that the Sisters have earned for their good works, humility, willingness

to courageously respond to change, and putting their faith values into practice.

Holding up the Sisters charity, steadfast support and imagination to think of creative solutions, Jeff Bartow, the Executive Director of the Southwest Organizing Project, described their deep respect for others and the Sisters' tenacity. Jeff also shared how important the role of the Sisters has been for non-violence, housing, and human development efforts in the community.

In appreciation of the Sisters of St. Casimir and the leadership of Sister Immacula Wendt, Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Sinai Chicago Board Chair, Brian Dolan, and Wayne Lerner, retired President and CEO of Holy Cross Hospital, announced that a new LED Holy Cross Hospital



Dennis Ryan, Bishop Daniel Turley, and Rachael Marusarz, Sinai Chicago Chief Development Officer pose for a photo.



Sr. Immacula Wendt offers closing remarks as Sisters Elizabeth Ann Yocius and Deborah Romanuski look on sharing smiles.

messaging sign is being built and will be seen from California Avenue to provide community announcements and health services information in English and Spanish. Over \$20,000 had already been donated in honor of the Sisters.



Surrounded by the Sisters of St. Casimir, Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM, and Sister Eleace King, IHM, Sister Immacula expressed appreciation on behalf of the Congregation and for God's grace, and the support of many in guiding the Sisters of St. Casimir through the making of future plans. She shared their joy in partnership with the IHM Sisters, Catalyst Charter Schools, Catholic Charities of Chicago, Southwest Organizing Project, Sinai Chicago, Southwest Chicago Homeless Services and more. Sister Immacula explained that the Sisters' ministries are now of prayer and presence.

Dr. Ngozi Ezike thanked the Sisters for their ongoing faithful service followed by sustained applause for many minutes. The celebration concluded with a prayer of thanksgiving by Dr. Nancy Streitmatter, SSC.



Dr. Ngozi Ezike announces that a new sign at Holy Cross Hospital will be installed in honor of the Sisters of St. Casimir. From left: Dr. Wayne Lerner, Sr. Immacula, Dr. Ngozi Ezike and Brian Dolan.



From left: Sr. Margaret Zalot, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Brittany Preston, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Yocius, State Senator Willie Preston, Sr. Immacula, Sr. Margaret Petcavage, and Senator Mattie Hunter.



Sr. Nancy Streitmatter leads the closing prayer. From left: Sisters Immacula Wendt, Rita Marie Kerdock, Virginia Gapsis, Margaret Zalot, Ellen Maroney, IHM, Elizabeth Ann Yocius, Theresa Dabulis, and Deborah Romanuski.

A Message From Sister Immacula



Greetings to you, dear Friends!

“Stand by the crossroads and look – pray and ask God to clearly open your eyes and heart to see where the good way is, see the direction God wants you to go. Walk in it and find rest.” Jeremiah (6:16)

We, the Sisters of St. Casimir, have met many crossroads, during these past years, and led by the Spirit we ventured on the good way.

Today, we have found rest. In the Fall 2023 issue of *Journeys* you may recall the cover story *Rooted in Love – Grown in Grace: A New Journey Begins* that highlighted the many recent miracles the Sisters of St. Casimir have experienced. That *Journeys* story was re-printed in the *Greater Southwest News-Herald*, our local neighborhood newspaper, *Sisters of St. Casimir come full circle*.

It has been important for us to inform you, all our dear Friends and Acquaintances, of the Sacred Journey we have traveled and the future of our Community. You have been a revered and special part of our lives throughout these years. We thank you and pray that you will continue to accompany us into our future.

We have met the crossroads, walked the new and unknown paths with deep faith, trust, and determination that we plan our own future, living fully to completion, while also remaining Sisters of St. Casimir. We have been deeply “Rooted in Love” these 116 years since our founding in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and with our dear IHM Sisters, we have “Grown in God’s Grace.” A gift freely given by God that we would never have dreamed of.

On August 29, 2024, we will come full circle when an IHM Sister will be called forth to be our Pontifical Commissary.

You may recall that we have requested Rome that this be an IHM Sister. On February 2, 2024 we received the approval from His Eminence, Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Given the present needs of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir, due to their reduction in numbers and the advanced ages of their members, and considering our request, and in order to ensure safe and sure support in these difficulties, this Dicastery appoints and nominates, Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM President of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and her Successors, Pontifical Commissary of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir.

The decree goes on to state:

In addition to the normal powers of governance, the Pontifical Commissary is to maintain constant and open dialogue with the Sisters, seeing to their spiritual and material needs and making choices that will ensure, as far as possible, the pursuit of a peaceful regular community life. Amen. Thanks be to God!

Since this is a new road to travel, not only for us SSC Sisters, but for so many other religious communities today, it is important to prepare ourselves for what this will mean and how it will affect our personal daily lives and the life of each of the Sisters of St. Casimir.

The Transitional Leadership Team: Sister Immacula Wendt, SSC, Sister Elizabeth Ann Yocius, SSC, and Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM, has been providing educational venues to help us understand what a Commissary is, and what that means for the SSCs and IHMs. We have been listening to many stories from Communities who already have a Pontifical Commissary.

Therefore, dear Friends, we have come to a new crossroad, once more. We willingly take to heart the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, we have opened our eyes and heart, and we freely embark on this good way of Commissary, the direction God wants us to go. We walk in it and we find rest.

All this can’t happen on our own. It is so important to implore God’s abounding love and intercession for us SSC and IHM Sisters as we prepare for the Commissary on August 29th.

May we ask you to join us in prayer? A beautiful prayer written by Sister Christine Koellhoffer, IHM, is presented for you to use.

We are most grateful.
Peace and blessings!
Always, with love and prayers,

*Sister Immacula Wendt,
General Superior*



Covenant painting by Sr. Lisa Perkowski, IHM depicting the salt ritual with Sr. Immacula Wendt, SSC on left and Sr. Terri O'Rourke, IHM. The salt ritual signifies the strong Covenant bond of the SSCs and IHMs.

Questions and Answers About Commissary



- **You may also be wondering, how does the IHM Commissary get to know all about the Sisters of St. Casimir, their customs, their daily lives?**

It is important that the Commissary has and uses the "collective wisdom" of at least two Councillors (sometimes called consultants) who are members of the SSCs. IHM members could also be part of the team.

- **How will the lives of the Sisters change?**

The lives of the Sisters will not change. Our mission and charism will not change.

- **What is a Commissary?**

It is a person appointed to act as the canonical superior of another institute (community).

- **However, it still is a strange word. Perhaps many of you can only picture a store with food and supplies on a military post.**

For this reason, some Communities are using the title: Canonical Leader, Trustee, Administrator, Pastoral Minister.

- **What is the role of a Commissary?**

Historically, a Commissary was used when a religious institute was unable to carry out the functions of its general government. Today, it is used to assist an institute which is unable to elect a full general government (general superior and council) from its own members, but which wants to continue living according to its own history, identity, and legacy.

- **Will the President of the IHMs do the actual work of the Commissary?**

Before August 29th, the Sisters of St. Casimir will submit names of IHM Sisters who they know and feel will be a good match to govern the SSCs. These names will be given to the IHM President who will, with the consult of her Leadership Team, delegate an IHM Sister to be the Commissary. From listening to the lived stories of Communities who already have a Commissary, there is usually a specific term of office for this position.

Prayer of Preparation for the Commissary

*Holy One, Journeying God,
You accompany your pilgrim people
into an unknown future.
Here, one thing only is certain:
Your constant and abiding love.
Your provident care brought together
Mother Cyril Conway, Mother Maria Kaupas,
and all our foremothers.
We pray that this same tender presence,
rooted in love and grown in grace,
will inspire our SSC Transitional Leadership Team
as we prepare for the Commissary.
We ask that you shape our lives together
as blessing for our beautiful yet wounded world.
We trust that you will lead us
through holy mystery,
across time and space,
and into the place of spaciousness of heart,
always more, always better, always with love.
May it be so!*



Mother Maria: A Beautiful "Gross" of Her Life

Mother Maria Masses continue to inspire the Sisters, Associates, our families and friends as we celebrate and pray for the beatification of Venerable Servant of God Mother Maria Kaupas.

As we slowly emerged from Covid, Mother Maria Masses were celebrated November 4, 2023 and January 6, 2024. The latter, a perfect day to remember Mother Maria's 144th birthday on the traditional feast of the Epiphany.

We were delighted to have Father Tom McCarthy, OSA as our celebrant. His homily beautifully illustrated the life of Mother Maria, helping remind us of her life-giving legacy for each one of us.

Excerpt from Fr. Tom McCarthy's homily:

A gross is a collection of 144 items. As we celebrate Mother Maria's 144th birthday today, I think of how the "gross" of her life has affected so many people and institutions in our Church.

In my own family, we have been blessed by Mother Maria's life. My four siblings and I were all born in Holy Cross Hospital. Sister June Puishys never let me forget she helped deliver me!
Thanks Sr. June!

My three sisters graduated from Maria High School in 1977, 1980, and 1987. As a student at St. Rita High School, Maria High School was our Sister School.

As we celebrate Mother Maria's 144th birthday today, let us be grateful for the "gross" of her life that has been given to us, is giving to us, and will always give to us in the future. Thank you God for the life, example, and legacy of Mother Maria Kaupas.



Mass celebrant Fr. Tom McCarthy, OSA assisted by Deacon Joseph Panek.



Sr. Deborah Romanuski and candle bearers SSC Associates Loretta Ezerski and Ginger Madden process out after Mass.



*Venerable Servant of God
Mother Maria Kaupas
Foundress, Sisters of St. Casimir*

This legacy was acclaimed by Sister Margaret Petcavage in her Communion meditation:

On the feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate the day God entered into our lives. Through His human birth, this Child was made manifest to the entire world and heralded the Mystery of "God made Man."

In the Old Testament and in the imagery of ancient literature following a star was often used to describe a person's search for light, truth, God, and Salvation. The Magi followed a star on their journey bearing gifts for the newborn King, the Savior of the world. In doing so, they found the greatest gift of all, Jesus, our Lord.

144 years ago, another star began to shine – one that would have deep significance within the lives of many people and for our Church.

This star was Casimira Kaupas, later Mother Maria. Casimira was born on

the feast of the Epiphany, in 1880 in Ramygala, Lithuania, a fitting birthday for a future Saint.

Just like the Magi, Mother Maria was led by a mysterious, persistent longing in her heart to discover God's will for her and to do something for His glory. It is said the Magi traveled far to find the Child, similarly Casimira crossed the ocean to an unknown land. Like the Magi she eventually discovered the meaning of her life, that is to live for God alone.

Upon seeing Sisters for the first time in Scranton, Pennsylvania, she instantly knew that is what she desired to do, bring others to the knowledge and love of God.

Mother Maria Mass Celebrations Continue



Fr. Tony Pizzo, OSA (center) enjoys coffee and conversations after the Mother Maria Mass. From left: John Stach, Rosa Ciampaglia, Andrea Gaytan and Sr. Marilyn Karpovich.

In her fidelity to follow God's will, her life unfolded in which she became a star, a light, a guiding force for many, leading them to Jesus and thus manifesting Him to all with whom she came in contact.

Her deep faith, courage, and desire to do great things for God spanned two continents, North America and Europe (Lithuania). She also desired to send her Sisters to Argentina which happened the year following her death.

The Sisters continue to work in Argentina as they have for the past 79 years.

Throughout her lifetime Mother Maria brought gifts of profound faith, unwavering hope, gentle love, faithful service, and compassion to many people. She ultimately became a lasting gift that continues through the work of the many women who followed her as Sisters of St. Casimir.

Mother Maria became an epiphany

of God in our world. She followed the example of Christ, our Lord, and became a person of selfless love who made goodness, peace, and justice more visible in our daily lives.

As we move into a new year, let us rely on the prayers and goodness of Mother Maria. Let us pray that her life may, through each of us, continue to reflect Jesus, who guides the way to our loving Father, as we endeavor to bring about a world of justice and peace.

Sisters of St. Casimir Auxiliary Present the SSCs with a Generous Donation



Sr. Elenisa Buzas, front row left, and Sr. Lourdine Ramoska gather for a photo in the Legacy Room after Mass. Standing, from left: SSC nurse Diane Banchak, Tony Ferro, and Sr. Janine Golubickis.



Sisters of St. Casimir Associate, Ginger Madden presents Sr. Immacula a donation on behalf of the SSC Auxiliary.

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JANUARY 1, 2023 – DECEMBER 31, 2023

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

Sisters of St. Casimir Support Allows Youth From Argentina Opportunity to Attend Lithuanian World Youth Congress

Thanks to the sponsorship of the Sisters of St. Casimir, Laima Bardini Ruplenas, Laima Griszka and Luciano Javier Caceres Contreras from Argentina were able to attend the XVII Lithuanian World Youth Congress.

The sessions took place in Boston, Massachusetts, Camp Neringa in Vermont, and Montreal, Canada from June 14-22, 2023 in a series of unforgettable days. There were over 100 delegates (ages 16-35) representing 18 countries: Argentina, Belarus, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Poland, Netherlands, France, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The Lithuanian World Youth Congress, first held in 1966, convenes every few years in a country where Lithuanian youth associations are active.

Over the course of 8 days, delegates debated 'hot topics' for the Lithuanian diaspora, enriched their Lithuanian identities, expanded their professional and personal networks, and crafted resolutions and motions. Delegates learned about the similarities as well as differences of their Lithuanian culture across the eighteen countries that they represent. They also shared their experiences about what it means to them to be a first, second, third, and even fourth-generation Lithuanian.



From left: Laima Bardini Ruplenas, Laima Griszka, Luciano Javier Caceres Contreras.

Prayer Group Prays for Mother Maria's Cause, Works to Keep Her Memory Alive

by Jake Betz

We in Mount Carmel, PA, walk the same streets that Maria Kaupas once did almost 117 years ago. That in itself is an awesome thing to ponder.

On October 7, 1907, Mother Maria Kaupas left Scranton for Mount Carmel, PA, where in January 1908, she presided over the opening of a school at Holy Cross Parish, the first Catholic school established in the United States for the children of Lithuanian immigrants.

Privileged as we are to pray for her beatification at the Mother Maria Kaupas Center within Divine Redeemer Church named in her honor, those active in the Kaupas Prayer Group spend much time trying to put ourselves in her shoes as we walk those streets. What was it like for Maria and other Sisters, new to their vocations, to teach young Lithuanian children and minister to their families? In this anthracite mining community, earning a living was difficult and potentially dangerous.

Her time in Mount Carmel was all too brief. In 1911, the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Saint Casimir opened in Chicago, and even from the beginning of her ministry, the growth of her congregation and the increased demand for the services of Sisters made Mother Maria's life a very busy one.

Because Holy Cross School was her first ministry and because her long-time friend and mentor, Father Anthony Staniuyknas, served as pastor at the time of the school founding, we are confident that Mount Carmel always remained special to Maria Kaupas. We have been assured that between her appointment as general superior of the congregation and her death in 1940, Maria Kaupas visited Mount Carmel on several occasions, just as she made regular visits to all other parishes in the Northeast and Midwest where her Sisters were assigned.

We can still see the church (closed



since 1995) where Maria Kaupas attended Mass and the now-decaying school building where Sisters taught for decades. Some of us were members of or occasionally attended Mass at Holy Cross. A family from our parish has resided for many years in the house where Mother Maria and her companions, Mother Immaculata and Mother Concepta first lived when they came to Mount Carmel. If only there were people left who met Mother Maria or were even taught by her. Oh, the stories they could tell us!

The prayer group meets regularly to pray for Mother Maria's beatification,



Holy Cross School in Mount Carmel, PA, the first Sisters of St. Casimir School (1908).

just as daily Mass attendees do following the recitation of the Rosary. We also reflect on her life of service and how we, present-day residents of Mount Carmel, can emulate her. We do this through monthly Holy Hours with Exhibition in the Center chapel and reflections on challenges she faced. We prepared and distributed a desk calendar for 2024 which, thanks to the Sisters of Saint Casimir, contain archived photos of her throughout her life.

The prayer group planned to celebrate Maria Kaupas' birthday in January but,



From left: Sisters M. Concepta, Mother Maria, and M. Immaculata.

unfortunately, the event had to be canceled because of a snowstorm. It will be rescheduled later this year.

Our mission is a simple one: To pray that she will be beatified and eventually canonized as the saint we know she is – and to keep her memory alive for this and future generations. We have learned that at every stage of her life, no matter how challenging the circumstances, Maria Kaupas responded through prayer and putting her faith in God no matter what happened. That remains a lesson that all of us need to learn and an example we need to follow.

Jake Betz is Director of the Mother Maria Kaupas Center in Mt. Carmel Pennsylvania.

What's happening at Villa?

by Jeanne Frawley
President

Access and Enrollment

A Blessing Indeed!

Thanks to the support of the Sisters of St. Casimir, our community partners, alumnae, and families, Villa is able to offer record scholarships and financial aid to deserving students. Access to education matters, and this group is making it happen. For the first time on record, Villa met 100% of demonstrated need for applicants. Due to the generosity of these allies, a group of strong, capable women will now benefit directly from Mother Maria's legacy.

Capital Expansion:

Lift Off To The Moon!

Villa launched a capital campaign in 2019 to update our science and math offerings. Over the last five years more than 55% of Villa graduates pursued STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) majors in college. This update will enhance their preparation and permit Villa to showcase the post-graduation opportunities for prospective families.

The space will also be utilized for early education programming, including the Sciathlon. Every year Villa welcomes over 100 students from regional Catholic grammar schools to learn and showcase their STEM skills. Sciathlon teams vie for bragging rights and recognition in a showcase for their teachers and families, building excitement for the next generation of female scientists.

Villa Excels Again: Exploring How Mission And Money Marry

Thanks to a grant from the Ambassador Fund for Catholic Education, Villa has launched a one-of-a-kind case study competition. Students are exploring how faith informs boardroom decisions, preparing them to be mission-driven leaders.

While common in university settings, Villa's program was the first of its kind at the high school level. Inspired by the global leadership of the Sisters of St. Casimir, the experience has demonstrated the power of a strong moral compass when making key leadership decisions. It's our Sisters who are showing an example of what intentional, responsible, long-term planning looks like, and those skills are crucial for our students' future success.

By opening lines of communication between the worlds of high school education and business, developing a cross-disciplinary program where students learn the positive impact of balancing mission and money, and building a repository of case studies for educators, this program will empower current Philadelphia-area teachers and future Catholic leaders, while serving as a national example for preparing future mission-driven leaders.

Prepared by experts such as Tracy Davidson of Philadelphia Channel 10 News, a select group of 10 students interviewed four area organizations about how faith informs board

room decisions. Supporting organizations included Penn Medicine (CEO Kevin Mahoney), Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia (CEO Corinne O'Connell), Philadelphia Eagles (Chief of Staff Tina D'Orazio), and an international real estate organization.

Four cases served as the basis for the December competition between eight teams from three Philadelphia area high schools: Holy Ghost Prep, Malvern Prep, and Villa Joseph Marie. Each team prepared and presented recommendations that were informed by faith (the Catechism, Catholic social justice teachings, and other sources).

Hearing directly from Catholic leaders about their decisions and then critically analyzing the cases, students experienced their theology lessons in a new light. Participating judges, including the Dean of St. Joseph's University Haub School of Business and the Vice President of Mission and Ministry from Villanova University, challenged the competing students on their citations and choices in which faith-based models informed recommendations, and students rose to the challenge.

Each member of the first place team received \$20,000 in college scholarships to St. Joseph's University, promoting continuity in Catholic education. Congratulations to the winners from Malvern Prep and Villa Joseph Marie!



1st and 2nd place teams, from left: VJM President, Jeanne Frawley, Erin Flatley, Grace Monaghan, Lana Leiter, Erica Johnson Malvern Prep team (1st place) and Director of Outreach at VJM Christine Caltabiano.

Sister Blessings and Special Visit at Franciscan Village

For the last 10 years, Jesuit priest Father Antanas Saulaitis has lived in Vilnius, Lithuania. He also lived there from 1997 to 2006 and returned to Lithuania in 2014. Father is a good friend of the Sisters and on a recent trip to Chicago found time to visit them at Franciscan Village in Lemont, IL.

When Father Saulaitis lived at the Lithuanian Youth Center located at 5620 S. Claremont Ave, Chicago in the Jesuit monastery (for more than 20 years) he would often visit the Sisters and serve as occasional chaplain at the Motherhouse a few miles away from the Lithuanian Youth Center. The Sisters enjoyed his homilies, sharing breakfast and stories with him, and stayed connected through many years.

When Father Saulaitis returned to live in Lithuania in 1997, he would often send written letters to the Sisters sharing and informing them about the Catholic church in Lithuania, which was slowly rebuilding after the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence on March 11, 1990. His letters would be displayed in the dining room for all the Sisters to read and enjoy.

The purpose of his visit was to promote and discuss a recent biographical book authored by Aurelija Savickiene titled:

Misionierius Antanas Saulaitis – žmogus, kuris visada šypsosi

Translation:

Missionary Antanas Saulaitis -
the man who always smiles.



A group photo with Fr. Antanas Saulaitis, SJ. From left: Sr. Marilyn Karpovich, Sr. Margaret Petcavage, Sr. Bernadette Marie Janus, Sr. Margaret Zalot, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Sr. Deborah Romanuski, Sr. Theresa Papsis, Sr. Janine Golubickis.

Father Antanas visited and blessed the Sisters in assisted living and those in skilled care at Mother Theresa Home. Independent Sisters gathered for conversations, coffee, and shared stories with Father Antanas for several hours.

Upon returning to Lithuania Father Antanas Saulaitis shared these words: "The best thing ever in this journey to Chicago for 12 days was the visit with the Sisters, praying, sharing stories and refreshments. I am always thankful for those years, and projects and ministries and the meals, and continuing our togetherness in Our Lord's service."



Sr. Elenisa Buzas greets Fr. Antanas.



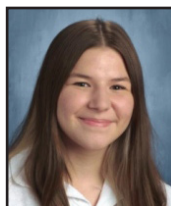
Sr. Leandra Yerkes blesses Fr. Antanas.

More from VJM

What is a Case Study Competition?

Students will be given real life scenarios from the boardroom. They will analyze the situation, develop a plan with options, and recommend the best path forward in a presentation to judges from local colleges and universities. Students will gain experience and grow with this opportunity to dive into these scenarios by considering and justifying their chosen next steps.

(Information by Christine Caltabiano, Director of Outreach at VJM and the VJM Impact Report)



Congratulations!

To Sarah Barats for winning the Region 11 Award for Pennsylvania's Youth Art Month.

Her artwork (on left) will be printed on a banner hanging in the Pennsylvania State Capitol during March 2024.

A virtual Art Reception and Award Ceremony will be held on March 15th recognizing Sarah, Villa Joseph Marie Art teacher Mrs. Cargas, and the following students who were selected to be in the online exhibit: Taylor Pitts, Haley Dickson, Elena Schwenker, and Ava Pagliaro.

At Journey's End — *Eternal Days Beginning*

Sister M. Elaine Kuizinas, SSC

OCTOBER 11, 1926 – NOVEMBER 10, 2023



Sister M. Elaine (Mary Kuizinas) was born October 11, 1926, to Joseph and Anna (Kaleskas) Kuizinas in Worcester, MA. Mary, the fifth of six children, received her education in Worcester at St. Casimir School and graduated from Classical High School in 1944. She worked and attended Salter

Secretarial School before enter-

ing the Sisters of St. Casimir in Chicago as a postulant on her 18th birthday.

The Sisters of St. Casimir, who taught her at St. Casimir School, inspired Mary to become a Sister and embark on this next part of her life journey. After arriving in Chicago, she began her preparation taking the name Sister M. Elaine at her reception, making her first vows as a Sister of St. Casimir on August 15, 1947 and her final vows on August 15, 1952.

In 1947 Sister Elaine began her life of ministry and service within the church as an educator. For fifteen years she taught kindergarten through seventh grades in the following schools: Nativity BVM (Chicago, IL), Sacred Heart (New Philadelphia, PA), St. John (Roswell, NM), St. Alphonsus (Baltimore, MD), St. George (Shenandoah, PA), St. Anthony (Cicero, IL).

In 1962 she began ministering in high schools, teaching mathematics at Maria High School (Chicago, IL) for nineteen years, and then becoming Principal of Villa Joseph Marie (Holland, PA) for the next nineteen years. Sister Elaine was much loved and respected in all the ministries as testimonies from her many students and colleagues attested to in writing and in person as she completed her years as Villa Principal in 2001, as an inductee to the VJM Wall of Fame in 1996, and during her 75th jubilee celebration in August, 2022.

As the Villa bid a fond farewell to Sister Elaine in 2001, among the reflections written about her include: "While maintaining the family spirit of the school and its focus on Catholic values, Sister Elaine provided the encouragement and support that enabled Villa to make advances in academics and athletics. Under her leadership the first advanced courses were offered, eventually leading to advanced placement courses in English, foreign languages, and the sciences. The Villa sports teams have also grown and achieved great things over the past 19 years, including league, district, and state championships in basketball, cross country, lacrosse, soccer, softball, and track. Under her leadership, Villa achieved the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence status in 1996. These and other

achievements contributed to a steady increase in enrollment during her tenure."

"Perhaps most significantly, Sister Elaine supported the establishment of VJM's first Board of Directors in 1991. Comprised of lay members and Sisters of St. Casimir, the Board worked with Sister Elaine to shepherd the school through the challenges and opportunities of the past decade, positioning the school for a very bright future."

Sister Elaine earned a BS in Education from Marywood College (Scranton, PA) and an MS in Mathematics from De Paul University (Chicago, IL). Coupled with her life experiences, she was well prepared for all her ministries. Being a life-long learner and the desire to excel at teaching, she served on several North Central Evaluation Committees, and was an integral part of the "New Math" program for the University of Illinois Committee on School Mathematics. She studied under the developers and authors of the program to ensure its success at Maria HS. After having received National Science Foundation Grants to study at Illinois Institute of Technology (Chicago, IL), DePaul University (Chicago, IL), and the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign, IL) during the summers of 1966-1970, she was employed as an assistant professor, instructing teachers, at Western Washington University (Bellingham, WA) during the 1971-1973 summer institutes.

After 19 successful and wonderful years as principal of Villa Joseph Marie, Sister Elaine returned to Chicago in 2001. In 2003 she was elected General Secretary and General Councilor for the Congregation, serving until 2008. While on the Council, she also enjoyed working at Holy Cross Hospital from 2002-2014.

Sister Elaine truly appreciated the beauty and magnificence of nature, especially mountains. She was blessed to have had travel adventures in 34 states, Canada, Europe, South America, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, and a special experience in the Holy Land. She enjoyed the four seasons each for its own natural charm but favored autumn the most.

Sister Elaine was entertained by many sporting events but liked football the best. She was a loyal follower of Notre Dame, the Patriots, and the Red Sox. During the last decade the Patriots were replaced by the Bears and White replaced Red for the Sox. She was known as the Villa's greatest cheerleader as she learned the rules of soccer and lacrosse while attending many games. She was also an outstanding and clever pinochle player.

In 2015, Sister Elaine moved to Franciscan Village in Lemont, IL where she provided a ministry of prayer and presence for the Sisters and residents there until her death.

At Journey's End — *Eternal Days Beginning*

Sister Grace Carol Wastak, SSC (formerly Sister M. Charles) APRIL 12, 1928 – DECEMBER 5, 2023



Sister Grace Carol Wastak was born April 12, 1928, to Andrew S. Wastak, Sr. and Josephine (Bajorinas) Wastak in Cicero, IL. Grace Carol was the second of three children. The family belonged to St. Anthony's Parish in Cicero. Grace Carol attended the parish school and then St. Casimir Academy for her high school years. The Sisters of St. Casimir were her teachers and had a positive influence on her.

Grace Carol entered the community as a postulant on February 2, 1947. In August of that year, she became a novice taking the name Sister M. Charles. She professed her first vows on August 15, 1949. Soon afterwards she began the ministry the Lord was asking her to do: in education, health care, and administration. Beginning with a class of 3rd graders at Immaculate Conception School in Brighton Park, she then went on to teach middle school students (grades 5-8) at Nativity BVM (Chicago, IL), St. Bartholomew (Waukegan, IL), Holy Cross School (Chicago, IL), St. Francis (Minersville, PA), St. Casimir (Philadelphia, PA), Sacred Heart (New Philadelphia, PA), St. John School (Roswell, NM), St. Norbert (Northbrook, IL), Sacred Heart (Clovis, NM), and St. Peter (Roswell, NM). Often, she taught music lessons too. In the early 1960s she began teaching high school science classes at Sacred Heart (Emerson, NE), Villa Joseph Marie High School (Holland, PA), and Maria High School (Chicago, IL). While in Emerson, NE she had time to develop her writing skills. Sister Grace Carol's poetry was published in several editions of National Poetry Press.

Sister Grace Carol completed her education at Marywood College in Scranton, PA earning a BS in Education and completed her master's studies at Villanova University in Villanova, PA which prepared her for ministry in teaching. After working for a year at Holy Family Villa in Palos Park, IL (1951-52) something stirred within her that eventually led her to get a master's degree in administration from Notre Dame University, a degree in nursing at Daley College, and become a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator of IL.

Sister Grace Carol was well prepared for her ministry as a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator at Holy Family Villa beginning in 1977 and continuing until 1985 at which time, she became Aging Services Organizer for Catholic Charities. While at Holy Family Villa, she also played the organ for liturgies.

In 1986 she was missioned to Holy Cross Hospital (Chicago, IL) where she served as Director of the newly

opened extended care unit of the hospital. In 1996 she took on the Department of Mission Effectiveness until her retirement from Holy Cross Hospital in March 2007, and her move to the Motherhouse.

Colleagues at Holy Cross Hospital shared some of their memories of Sister Grace Carol:

Nancy Shotas: I enjoyed working with Sister Grace Carol on the activities committee. She was such a good sport, always ready to cheer on accomplishments and connect them with a word that meant much to employees: SERVE – service, excellence, respect, value, enthusiasm.

On the first Sunday of December each year, she would ride with Ron Iocano in a side car on his motorcycle in the Toys for Tots parade.

Joe Respanti: I have warm memories of Sister Grace Carol, loved her enthusiasm. I was touched when she gave me a Babe Ruth cap when I retired from Holy Cross Hospital.

Donna Parker: I enjoyed working with Sister Grace Carol, she was always taking care of her patients in the extended care unit.

In 2014 Sister Grace Carol moved to Franciscan Village in Lemont, IL shortly after her good friend, Sister Teresita, moved to skilled care at Mother Theresa Home. This is where she spent most of her days, a true friend in ministry of prayer and presence. After Sister Teresita's death, Sister Grace Carol moved to Assisted Living where she spent several years until she needed more care and then moved to Mother Theresa Home (skilled care).

During her 60th Jubilee in 2009, Sister Grace Carol shared her wisdom: "I would pass on to others — cultivate, nurture, and retain a sense of humor." From her bed in Mother Theresa Home, she not only read countless mystery books by James Patterson, John Grisham, and others, she also enjoyed reading the weekly edition of the Southwest News Herald (local news from the southwest side of Chicago). Those who visited her often left with a smile on their faces. "See you later alligator..."

Sister Grace Carol celebrated several milestones in her religious life: Silver Jubilee in 1974, Golden Jubilee in 1999, and 60th Diamond Jubilee in 2009. On August 15, 2024, she would have celebrated her 75th Diamond Jubilee as a Sister of St. Casimir.

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

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Save the date!

Saturday, April 20, 2024 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

