



# Journeys

SISTERS OF ST. CASIMIR

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## Sisters of St. Casimir Honored by U.S. – Baltic Foundation

On May 8, 2010 the U.S.–Baltic Foundation honored the Sisters of St. Casimir with the USBF Humanitarian Award at its annual gala event held at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC. Sr. Immacula and the SSC Leadership were in the Washington area for meetings at that time and were happy to be able to receive the award in person.

The U.S.–Baltic Foundation was established in 1990 to support the efforts of the Baltic nations for independence and to develop strong ties with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Every year, the Foundation honors persons who have contributed to the development of the Baltic nations through cultural, political, or economic achievements, as well as honoring the accomplishments of Americans of Baltic heritage. This year the guest of honor and keynote speaker was Andrius Kubilius, the Prime Minister of Lithuania. Sr. Immacula accepted the award in the name of all the Sisters past and present in recognition of their outstanding contribution to humanitarian causes in the United States and Lithuania.



*Sister Immacula Wendt, General Superior, accepts the U.S.–Baltic Foundation Humanitarian Award on behalf of the Sisters of St. Casimir.*



*Sisters of St. Casimir (from left) Immacula Wendt, Margaret Zalot, Regina Marie Dubickas, Theresa Dabulis, and Theresa Papsis, pose with Dr. John Prunskis, U.S.–Baltic Foundation board member, and Anne Derse, U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, after the Sisters received the 2010 USBF Humanitarian Award.*

### SSCs MAINTAIN STRONG TIES TO LITHUANIA

Mother Maria Kaupas, Foundress of the Sisters of St. Casimir, was born in Ramygala, Lithuania in 1880 and came to the U.S. at the request of her brother priest to serve as his housekeeper. Here she saw Sisters for the first time and was inspired to found a congregation that would sustain and nourish the faith life of the early Lithuanian immigrants in the U.S.

In 1911, the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Casimir was established in Chicago, IL where there was a large population of Lithuanians. From the Motherhouse, Sisters were sent to other Lithuanian communities, from the small mining towns of Pennsylvania to the farmlands of Nebraska and Iowa to the growing parishes in the big cities of Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Cleveland. Throughout their 103 year history, the Sisters ministered in over 60 parishes, secondary schools, hospitals and retirement homes across the United States and in Argentina.

Mother Maria established the Sisters of St. Casimir of Lithuania in 1920, and the Sisters in Lithuania and the congregation in the U.S. have retained strong ties. When Lithuania re-

*(“Ties to Lithuania” continued on page 3)*



## Dear Friends,

We are Alleluia People and “Alleluia” is our song! Oh, how our hearts can’t help but rejoice during the glorious days of Easter!

And, what follows – total amazement – the promised gift from the Father and the Son! The Spirit, our Sanctifier! “Suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind...then there appeared to them tongues as of fire...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts of the Apostles 2:1-5) Pentecost, the birthday of the Church! The message continues to ring out loud and clear! Fear not! You must go! Now is the time! “Awake from your slumber! Arise from your sleep! A new day is dawning... The people in darkness have seen a great light...The Lord of all kindness has called us to be a light for his people to set their hearts free...Proclaim the good tidings that all may rejoice!” (Hymn: City of God)

This is what our lives are to be about. Look around. The world needs healing in so many ways and by our faith we are called to do something about it. The power of the Spirit is with us and we all CAN make a difference in the world, in our families, our parishes, our neighborhoods, our places of work. Mother Maria was deeply sensitive to the proddings of the Spirit and encouraged her Sisters to go out to bring God’s presence and compassion to those in need. We see this need more than ever today as we go about building the city of God – being that beacon of hope at an immigration rally, that witness to God’s love through our hospitality to our guests at the Motherhouse, that ray of sunshine to those who long to know that God cares for them, the sick and infirm, the homeless and the jobless, the victims of abuse or violence, those living in the ‘barrios’ of Argentina or in our own neighborhoods, or even in our own homes. This is the call of the Spirit!

Pentecost truly is a glorious day, a day that holds out a challenge to each of us to do what we can to build that city of God. It is time! The Spirit sets our hearts aflame with courage and a passion to do the right thing!

“Come, Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

*Sister M. Immacula, S.C.C.*

Sister M. Immacula  
General Superior  
Sisters of St. Casimir

## Immigration Dialogue Continues

The leadership of the Sisters of St. Casimir attended a special Immigration Mass at St. Alphonsus Church in Washington, D.C., on March 21, 2010. Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, concelebrated the Mass with many priests from around the country, and delivered a powerful homily on the immigration issue. The church was filled to capacity, including a very large delegation from Illinois. After the Mass, most of the participants were able to walk to the National Mall and join the many people who were gathering there to remind President Obama about his campaign promise to work toward a just and compassionate reform of the immigration laws.

The immigration issue evokes strong emotional reactions from many people. In his writings, Cardinal Mahony remarked, “Our highest priority today is to bring calm and reasoning to discussions about our immigrant brothers and sisters.” The SSC Leadership Council had already planned to be in the Washington, D.C. area when they learned of plans for the rally at the Mall. They joined over 150,000 people who stood together for five hours, listening to experiences and stories, voicing a need for changes to be made and a path to citizenship to be offered, and declaring their hope in this country in which so many immigrants have made their home. The rally was peaceful and the message was clear; the hope is that those who have the power to make a difference will hear and respond.

For their participation in the immigration rally, the entire delegation from the Chicago Southwest Organizing Project was recognized publicly on March 24th at a Southwest Action Council Meeting held at the SSC Motherhouse.



*Jeff Bartow, Director of the Southwest Organizing Project, Sr. Margaret Zalot, Sr. Theresa Dabulis, Sr. Immacula Wendt and Sr. Regina Dubickas joined the delegation from Chicago’s Southwest Organizing Project in Washington, D.C. at a rally to bring attention to the need for compassionate and just reform of immigration laws.*

# Sisters of St. Casimir Argentine Associates

Sister Joyce Ann Dopkin, SSC Associate Director in Avellaneda, Argentina, invited the SSC Associates in Argentina to renew their commitment as Prayer Associates of the Sisters of St. Casimir on February 6, 2010.



*SSC Argentine Associates Maria Clara Plesniak and Pablo Plesniak participated in the commitment ceremony.*

This commitment ceremony took place during the monthly Mass for the beatification of Mother Maria Kaupas held in the Sisters' convent chapel in Avellaneda, Argentina. Father Agustin, MIC, was the celebrant of the Mass and twenty-five associates were able to participate that day.

are invited to say daily the prayer of the Associates and are encouraged to live out in their lives the values expressed in the prayer. Associates also pray for the Sisters of St. Casimir and for the beatification of Mother Maria. The associates have a close relationship with the Sisters, and are invited to join them in opportunities for prayer and various other activities.

Sisters of St. Casimir Associates are Christian women and men who share in and live out the mission of the Sisters of St. Casimir in the spirit of their Foundress, Servant of God, Maria Kaupas. The Associates commit themselves to this relationship annually. SSC Associates maintain their own vocation and lifestyle and do not profess vows with the Congregation.



During the liturgy, Sister Joyce called forth each associate and presented him/her with a certificate marking the occasion. Sister Immacula Wendt was there to personally accept the commitment, and all the Sisters of St. Casimir present (Sisters Joyce Ann, Immacula, Nilda Varanauskas, Asuncion Costantini, and Margaret Zalot) participated in a special blessing. After Mass, everyone enjoyed time together with coffee and refreshments.

Sister Joyce has been inviting members of Madre de Misericordia parish, the chapel in Villa Tranquila, and other friends to become SSC prayer associates. Since the associate program was initiated in the 1980's over 70 people of all ages have become members. Members



*Sisters of St. Casimir Argentine Associates gather in Avellaneda, Argentina on February 6, 2010 for their annual commitment ceremony.*

If you are interested in learning more about the Sisters of St. Casimir Associates, please contact Sr. Marilyn Karpovich at 773-776-1324, or email [mkarpovich@ssc2601.com](mailto:mkarpovich@ssc2601.com). In Argentina, contact Sr. Joyce Ann at [sscavell@speedy.com.ar](mailto:sscavell@speedy.com.ar).

*Associates Mirta Armoa and Rosa Scarazzini share a moment after the liturgy in the Sisters' chapel.*



## *Ties to Lithuania continued from page 1*

gained its independence in 1991, the Sisters of St. Casimir were quick to respond to the spiritual and material needs of women religious in Lithuania as they emerged into a whole new way of life and ministry. Numerous trips were made to Lithuania to give workshops, updates, and mentoring. The Sisters of St. Casimir in the U.S. obtained grants and established a "Pazaislis Fund" to help the Sisters of St. Casimir in Lithuania restore their beautiful historic convent site and to create a center for spiritual renewal. The SSCs brought several Lithuanian Sisters to the U.S. for educational purposes. The Sisters of St. Casimir of Chicago also served in other ways: as part of the APPLE program, giving a year of service teaching in a Catholic high school in Lithuania; as part

of a special four week program sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in which workshops were open to all religious communities in Lithuania on formation, spirituality, and human development; and as presenters of new methods in religious education and in the preservation of archival materials.

The Sisters of St. Casimir remain faithful to the vision of Mother Maria whose deep faith in God's presence inspired her to respond with generosity and love to the needs of her time. Today the Sisters of St. Casimir continue their mission to nourish and sustain the life of faith in the fields of education and health care, as well as in areas of social justice and caring for those whom God has placed in their path.

# Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Sisters of St. Casimir welcomed with joy the leadership team of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) from Scranton, Pennsylvania, on March 4, 2010. Sister Mary Persico, President, Sisters Mary Jo Gallagher, Katie Clauss, Susan Hadzima, Amy Zychal, and Barbara Jablonski were invited to celebrate the SSC patronal feast of St. Casimir and to be the presenters at the SSC assembly the following day.

The liturgy of the feast of St. Casimir, was celebrated by Rev. Terrence Moran, CSsR, a Redemptorist priest known to both religious communities. Father Moran had spent the day giving a retreat to the teachers and staff of Maria High School, using experiences from the life of Mother Maria and applying them to the mission of all at Maria.



*Sister Janine Golubickis (left) chats with IHM Sisters Katie Clauss and Amy Zychal after the liturgy.*



*IHM Sisters Mary Persico, Susan Hadzima, Amy Zychal, Mary Jo Gallagher, Barbara Jablonski and Katie Clauss, receive a blessing from the SSCs before presenting a short history of their Congregation and the various ministries in which the IHMs are engaged today.*



*(from left) Sister Milda Blinstrubas, Sister Mary Jo Gallagher, IHM; Sister Barbara Jablonski, IHM; Sister Salvatore Ciuckyte and Sister Deborah Romanuski were happy to celebrate the Feast of St. Casimir liturgy together in the SSC chapel.*

Later that evening, the Sisters were enchanted by the musical program provided by Andy Tecson and his wife, Nancy Hagen Tecson. Nancy, who plays and teaches both piano and oboe and whose background includes a performance in Carnegie Hall, played "Gabriel's Oboe," a beautifully haunting melody from the movie, "The Mission." She was accompanied by Sr. Theresa Papsis on

the piano. Other wonderful musical renditions were performed by Andy Tecson playing the saxophone accompanied by Nancy on the piano.

Andy is an accomplished saxophone player and, since 1982, heads a group



*(from left) Sister Bernadette Marie Janus, Sister Mary Persico, IHM, and Sister Elaine Kuizinas join in the rousing "When the Saints Go Marching In" which was led by Andy Tecson on his sax.*



*Sister Theresa Papsis accompanies Nancy Hagen Tecson who played a beautiful rendition of "Gabriel's Oboe." Later, Nancy took a seat at the piano to accompany her husband, Andy Tecson, (seated) as he played the saxophone.*

of jazz musicians who have brought the spontaneity of jazz into worship settings. The evening ended with a rousing "When the Saints Go Marching In" to which many Sisters responded by following Andy around the room clapping and singing.

# Make SSC Assembly and Feast Day Extra Special



*Sisters Margaret Mary Mazgelis, Clement Mazgelis, Marilyn Kuzmickus, Paulissa Puisis, Elaine Kuizinas and Nancy Streitmatter join all the SSCs in blessing the IHMs.*

On March 5th, the SSCs and IHMs engaged in a faith sharing about the women religious in their communities who had inspired them and who were a prophetic sign to them of God's continuing presence and activity. This was followed by a presentation about the IHMs: the



*Fr. Terry Moran, CSsR, Sister Mary Jo Gallagher, IHM, and Sister June Puishys join together in prayer.*

history of their Congregation and the main aspects of their life and ministry today. The Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from Scranton, Pennsylvania, have always been an integral part of SSC history, from our founding days until the present. Mother Maria and our first members received their religious formation in their novitiate. IHM Sisters served as mentors and superiors,

even coming to Chicago when the Motherhouse was built in 1911. They offered degrees in education from Marywood College (now Marywood University), sending their Sisters to Chicago to give courses to the SSCs. They encouraged Mother Maria to establish St. Casimir Academy soon after the Motherhouse was built.



*SSC Sisters (from left) Margaret McTaggart, Jean Girzaitis and Dolorine Lopez greet Sister Katie Clauss, IHM.*

The relationship with the IHM Sisters has continued and has been strengthened over the ensuing years, providing the gentle power of sisterhood. They remain our sister companions on the journey of faith on which we are all embarked.



*During their stay, the IHM Sisters spent time with the SSCs in the infirmary. Shown above: Sr. Maura Werbicki; Sr. Katie Clauss, IHM; and Sr. Amy Zychal, IHM. Shown at right: Sr. Susan Hadzima, IHM, (standing) with Sr. Casimira Vilkeviciute.*



These days together ended on March 6th as we celebrated the Mass for the beatification of Mother Maria with our family and friends.



*The leadership teams of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sisters of St. Casimir pose for a group picture in the chapel. Back row from left: Sr. Mary Jo Gallagher, IHM; Sr. Mary Persico, IHM, President; Sr. Katie Clauss, IHM; Sr. Susan Hadzima, IHM; and Sr. Margaret Zalot, SSC. Front row from left: Sr. Theresa Dabulis, SSC; Sr. Barbara Jablonski, IHM; Sr. Immacula Wendt, SSC, General Superior; Sr. Regina Marie Dubickas, SSC; and Sr. Amy Zychal, IHM.*



# Reflections on a Journey

By Sister Margaret Zalot, SSC

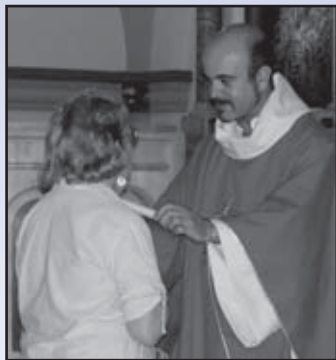
## WE ARRIVE IN ARGENTINA

“Hola! Buenos Días! Buenas Tardes! Mucho Gusto! Gracias!” Limited as though this vocabulary might seem, these were the words that began the connections of Sister Immacula and myself to our Sisters in Argentina and the people they serve.



*Upon our arrival, Sister Joyce Ann Dopkin (third from left) was delighted to introduce us to the families she serves (Sr. Immacula, far right).*

Eagerly we both embarked on this journey the afternoon of February 2 and began what would be an exciting and faith-filled trip to Argentina. We “enjoyed” our night’s rest on the plane so that we could begin our time in Argentina “with our feet on the ground!” Before we were to lay our heads on our pillows for the night, Sister Joyce Dopkin brought us to the Villa in Avellaneda where we met the families she serves. We were warmly received into their homes. With little time to spare, we were on-time for the evening Mass in the parish of Our Lady of Misericordia celebrating the Feast of Saint Blase.



*Evening Mass in the parish of Our Lady of Misericordia celebrated the Feast of St. Blase.*



With little time to spare, we were on-time for the evening Mass in the parish of Our Lady of Misericordia celebrating the Feast of Saint Blase.

## ON TO CORDOBA

After a good night’s rest in the convent at Avellaneda we were ready for our airplane trip to Cordoba. The Sisters from Avellaneda – Sisters Nilda Varanauskas, Joyce Ann Dopkin, and Asuncion Costantini – were going to make the trip by car and join us on Friday. That gave us the opportunity to meet with the Sisters in Cordoba – Sisters Jeanne Moceyunas, Elenisa Buzas, and Estela Risso – before the others arrived for our meetings.

Once all eight of us were together, the meetings began in earnest with a few opportunities to enjoy meals on the patio. Did I forget to mention it was summer in Argentina? That we enjoyed iced “mate” (Argentine tea) and iced tea? And, that afternoon siestas were a must?



*Sisters from both Argentine mission houses, Sr. Immacula, and I (taking the picture) enjoy a meal together.*

## Prayers, Meetings and Visits

We prayed together, shared about our life in the States as they shared about their life in Argentina, held lengthy discussions on our core values of spirituality, community, mission, and stewardship, watched DVDs on immigration, viewed powerpoint presentations with photos of our Sisters, shared meals together with beautifully sung meal prayers, and celebrated Eucharist, usually in the local parish church. Some of the highlights of our meetings together included a special “end of the year” holy hour (the Sisters in Argentina were ending their summer vacation), a “Christmas celebration,” the missioning of each sister for the apostolic year which would begin on March 1, and making individual and community commitment to “care for the earth” and to pray and take action on immigration issues as they exist in Argentina.

# Gracias, Amigos de Argentina!



*We prayed together often during our time together which was also filled with meetings and discussions.*

## SSC Ministries in Argentina

We also had the opportunity to experience ministry first hand: the wonderful presence of the Sisters in each parish, the dedication within the “Villas” (economically depressed sections of the city) in both Avellaneda and Cordoba, the opportunities for educational ministry within the classroom and in tutoring, the long time ministry with SSC Associates, and the many friendships developed over the years.



## SIGHTSEEING

While in Argentina, we also visited a few places: the mountains of Carlos Paz, the “Holy Land” or “Tierra Santa” in Buenos Aires, the outdoor fair at Recoleta, Our Lady’s Shrine in Lujan, and dinner and folkloric show in San Antonio de Areco.

Most of the time I was hoping that all these wonderful experiences were within walking distance, but they were not. They were usually a “long drive” away and, though we always



*Here we are at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lujan.*



*Some drives took longer than others.*

had excellent drivers, I was not always the most relaxed passenger in the very different rules of the road in Argentina. I was always happy to get to our destination safely!



*The Sisters of St. Casimir, Argentine Region (from left): Sisters Estela Riso (Cordoba) Jeanne Moceyunas (Cordoba) Joyce Ann Dopkin (Avellaneda), Nilda Varanauskas (Avellaneda) Asuncion Costantini (Avellaneda) and Elenisa Buzas (Cordoba)*

## MUCHAS GRACIAS Y ADIOS!

Both Sister Immacula and I were sad to leave. We had become a part of the lives of our six sisters in Argentina and they a part of ours. Our journey was a blessing! We had much to bring home! Gracias a Dios y a las hermanas para nuestras bendiciones!

# Along the Way

## Helping a Ministry in Peru



Sr. Margaret Petcavage (second from left), was assisted by (from left) her sister-in-law Leona Petcavage, Sr. Therese Banach and Sr. Maureen Juozapavicius in preparing over 200 boxes of religious articles and needed household items for Fr. Jose Lucchesi (center) who serves God's people in a remote area of Peru. Originally from Chicago, Fr. Lucchesi has faithfully ministered to the spiritual and temporal needs of the people of Peru for over 30 years building churches, chapels and schools. Sr. Margaret, and all who worked with her in collecting these items spending many days packing them for shipping, truly share in Fr. Jose's missionary work. He in turn is deeply grateful for everything they did and continue to do for him and his people. Not pictured in the photo but of great assistance in this endeavor were Audrey and Joe Panek and Terry Yates.

## SSCs turn "Techie"

Karen Strabel, a 1968 graduate of Maria High School with an education and computer background, has been conducting one-on-one computer instructions with the Sisters at the Motherhouse and Maria convent since the fall of 2009. The sessions are individualized for the needs of each Sister. Karen's gentle and encouraging manner has proved quite effective in helping many of the Sisters feel more comfortable with computers and the Internet. Lessons include instructions for managing files, navigating the 'net, geneology research, and word processing skills. And yes, in an ironic classroom twist, the Sisters are often given homework for their next class!



*Karen Strabel (left) works with Sr. Lucille Ann Bandyk during the week's computer lesson.*

## Conception Seminarians

Once again, Rev. Samuel Russell, OSB, travelled to Chicago with a group of seminarians from Conception Missouri for a Marian Pilgrimage. The Sisters of St. Casimir hosted their visit, and were happy to meet and greet these young men. They hold a special place in the prayers of the Sisters, especially in this Year of Priests. The following are notes from two of the seminarians.



*"As part of our senior pilgrimage with Fr. Samuel Russell OSB, rector of Conception Seminary College, we visited Chicago, its cathedral and many other churches. During our stay in Chicago we were fortunate to stay with the Sisters of St. Casimir at their motherhouse. The Sisters provided comfortable accommodations for us including very nice rooms and plenty of good food. Beyond that, the Sisters were very welcoming and often went out of their way to provide for us. During our meals and at other times, the Sisters had many conversations with us. In these pleasant discussions we learned a lot about their lives and the Church in Chicago. Our stay with them was great and we were all sad to leave the Sisters' warm hospitality. We are very grateful to the Sisters of St. Casimir!"*

*— Andrew Walsh*

*"The sisters were awesome. They were fun to talk to, and they took care of us more like family than guests. . . . They are great, loving, kind people."*

*— P.J. Voegeli*

# Along the Way

## Earth Week 2010

This year Earth Week was celebrated April 17-25. During this time the Sisters of St. Casimir, their employees, friends, and those in their sponsored institutions had the opportunity to commemorate the week by focusing on a common environmental theme each day, reading, reflecting, and praying on that theme, and coming to some action that would lead to caring for the earth in a more thoughtful manner. The highlight of the week was the special Earth Day prayer service that included the blessing and planting of a new red oak tree on the Motherhouse campus. This tree replaced one that had been planted during Mother Maria's time.



*Sisters of St. Casimir, SSC employees, and representatives from Holy Cross Hospital and Maria High School – including the school's Environmental Club, were among those on hand for the Earth Day prayer service and tree planting held on April 22, 2010, at the SSC Motherhouse.*



*Sr. Pieta Lansberkas, 102, (left) and Sr. Mildred Penkunas, 100, were the most senior participants of the tree planting ceremony. They are pictured here after having each placed soil around the tree.*

Earth Day 2010 in Chicago was a beautiful, sunny day – a perfect day to plant a tree. Laima Jakelaitis, Motherhouse employee, reflected on the experience: “Every person should plant a tree during his/her lifetime. A person dies, but the tree that is planted lives on. May the tree which we planted grow strong and tall because, together with the soil we placed around the tree, we also placed

the warmth of our hearts. The branches reach to heaven and the roots reach deep into the earth.”

The Sisters have been making a conscious effort to increase their care for the earth. In April, 2009, Sisters and staff, Maria high school students and faculty, and friends, signed the “SSC Pledge for the Earth” and continue to live by its principles.

## New Life at the SSC Motherhouse



This Spring the SSC Motherhouse community was excited to watch as two Canadian geese chose a rocky second floor roof to build their nest. Many questions and concerns arose as to the wisdom of this decision, since the Motherhouse grounds are also home to seagulls, falcons and various other wildlife. But the male did not stray far as he kept a vigilant eye on his family. All watched in wonder of the faithfulness exhibited by the geese parents, protecting their fragile eggs throughout all kinds of weather. Two healthy goslings hatched and within two days were coaxed off the roof by their parents. With a little help from their SSC friends, the family walked safely across two streets and through the Maria High School parking lot to Marquette Park. All a part of God's amazing plan.



## Along the Way

### Infirmiry Sisters say, “Ole!”



Mrs. Joan “Joanie” Mullen, SSC Infirmiry Activities Director, chats with Sr. Cecilia Papsis at the Cinco de Mayo celebration held in the infirmiry. After a round of attempts to break a piñata filled with surprises, the Sisters enjoyed decorative sombreros filled with candy and a sampling of delicious flan. Joanie Mullen fills the Sisters’ days twice a week with organized prayers, exercise, games, movies, birthday celebrations and many other fun and enriching activities.

### SSC Auxiliary hosts Successful Games Party



Mrs. Eleanor Ebert, President of the Sisters of St. Casimir Auxiliary and Games Party Chairperson, and Sr. Genevieve Kripas, SSC Auxiliary Moderator, are shown here among the many raffle prizes offered at the successful SSC Auxiliary Games/Bingo Party held in April. Proceeds from this annual fundraiser go toward the SSC Retirement Fund.

## Remembering Mother Maria

*The following reflection was written by Angela Maria Cibulskis Jones, grand-niece of Mother Maria, written in 1986 on the occasion of Mother Maria’s 100th birthday. We share it with you again, in this year marking the 70th anniversary of Mother Maria’s entrance into eternal life.*



Reverend Mother was in my life from the day I was born. My recollections as a pre-schooler were the pleasant times I spent in the convent. My mother was very ill, hospitalized for a period of time. My sisters and I were “farmed out” to relatives, etc. My “farm out” was to stay in the convent while my mother recuperated. It was Mother Maria’s kindness to her niece — my mother, Katherine — that introduced me to convent life. It never seemed harried; the nuns were always happy, contented. I remember Mother Maria enthusiastically playing catch with me, encouraging me to throw straight, run fast, and laugh at my mistakes and hers. The ball would wobble; it delighted her when I caught it “expertly.” We took winding walks through the orchard — not far from things, and yet you could feel alone and away from the world. I felt that this was her favorite spot.

As my sisters and I grew, it was part of our life to visit Mother Maria at least one Sunday each month, go to the convent for piano lessons and always be sure to stop by her office or seek her out to spend a few moments with her. She was so gentle, soft in demeanor and manner. She had a delightful sense of humor, laughed easily. She was interested in our health, progress in school, and personal problems. She would point out the lovely day, the birds chirping, the robin’s red breast, the wren in the tree, the insects, the flowers, and how great God was, how much He loves us to put it all here for us to enjoy. I felt we could tell her anything, share our secrets and feelings, and she would understand. It was never boring to visit with her. She enjoyed just being in your company, and you didn’t want to leave.

She was small in stature, so tiny and yet tall. Her garments seemed too voluminous. She had gentle, yet penetrating soft brown eyes. I never saw them flash in anger — only twinkle when delighted. She seemed beautiful to me, I thought she must love God very much for nothing seemed too hard, too challenging for her; she was so gentle and yet so strong . . .

Yes, she was a saintly person, not the stereotype, but a human saint. At the time of my association with her, I never thought about her being a saint; she was just a great human being. Only after her death did I realize that she was so extraordinary. I found myself praying to her for her intercession. I felt I could still talk with her — I still do. I feel she is a “special one” of God, she is spiritually with me. I feel blessed having known her. If I needed a miracle I know I would pray to her so that she could intercede to grant my need.

*Mass for the  
Beatification of  
Mother Maria is  
held monthly in  
the SSC chapel.  
Call 773-776-  
1324 for details.*

## At Journey's End — *Eternal Days Beginning*

### Sister Vita Arcisauskas, SSC

September 2, 1913 – February 12, 2010

Sister M. Vita was born on September 2, 1913 in Chicago Heights, IL to Peter and Anna Gaucias Arcisauskas. She attended elementary school at St. Casimir Parish in Chicago Heights, IL, and entered the Sisters of St. Casimir at the age of fourteen, following in the footsteps of her sister Lenore (Sister Malvina, SSC) who had entered a year earlier.



Sister Vita earned a B.A. degree in education from Marywood University in Scranton, Pennsylvania. For 55 years of her religious life, she taught in elementary schools staffed by the Sisters of St. Casimir in Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. For 12 of those years, she served as principal of Our Lady of Guadalupe School in Clovis, New Mexico and Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Cleveland, Ohio. Of the latter experience, Sister Vita wrote, "The most challenging, but most fruitful experience I had was being assigned as a teacher, principal, and superior in a newly built school and convent in Cleveland, Ohio. It was a rather humbling experience to be asked to give root and foundation to this project. This new and well equipped school fulfilled every teacher's dream and went on to become one of the best schools in the Cleveland diocese where the students excelled not only in academics but in being faith-filled, God loving people." Lasting friendships and grateful students remained in her prayers.

Sister Margaret Petcavage, SSC, lived with Sister Vita for a number of years and shared the following reflection. "Sister Vita was small in stature, but large in goodness, purpose, and spirit. She was gifted with leadership qualities, organizational skills, a commitment to education, and openness to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Faithful to her life as a religious, Sister Vita lived simply, never keeping what was not essential. I will always remember her for her generosity of heart, her encouraging ways, her fidelity to prayer and her great love for family and friends."

In her later years, Sister Vita lived at the Motherhouse, assisting Sister Grace Ann in the treasurer's office. She also enjoyed visiting the Sisters in the infirmary.

As she celebrated her Diamond Jubilee (75 years of religious life) in 2006, Sister Vita wrote, "Psalm 90 says 'Seventy is the sum of our years, eighty if we are strong.' What can one say about 92? God in his goodness has seen fit for me to continue to be of assistance even to this day and I eagerly seek to lend a helping hand."

What, then, can we say of Sister Vita's 96 years? A life of faith, service, and gratitude to God, to her community, and to her family! We, in turn, are grateful to God for Sister Vita and the gift of her life on this journey of faith.

### Sister Mary Constance Balkus, SSC

March 16, 1920 – May 13, 2010

Sister Mary Constance Balkus was born on March 16, 1920 to Konstant and Mary Paspirgelis Balkus, in Chicago, Illinois. Sophie, the name given to the new-born, was Konstant and Mary's second child; they were blessed by God with a son, Bernard and two other daughters, Mary, and Lee (Lillian).



Sophie graduated from Fenger High School and studied at Chicago College of Commerce, a Junior College known for providing a good foundation for those planning to enter the business world. She quickly found a position working as a secretary in a publishing company. While Sophie spent her day at work, her younger sisters, Mary and Lillian, attended St. Casimir Academy and became better acquainted with their teachers, the Sisters of Saint Casimir.

Encouraged by their parish priest who was aware that the three girls were thinking about religious life, Mary and Lillian entered the Sisters of St. Casimir Congregation. A year later, Sophie followed them and on August 15, 1949, Sophie, now known as Sister Mary Constance, pronounced her vows to God as a Sister of St. Casimir. While Sister Constance anxiously waited for her first assignment, she wrote, "First profession of vows brought an excitement and expectation of its own. What does Jesus expect of me? How can I serve Him best?"

Sister's first assignment was to teach the first grade at Nativity B.V.M. School. During the 32 years that Sister Constance taught first grade, her gentle and kind manner and love of God touched the hearts of children and parents at Nativity B.V.M. and Immaculate Conception Schools in Chicago; St. Clement School, Fort Lauderdale, Florida; St. Joseph School, Scranton, Pennsylvania; St. Joan of Arc, Aberdeen, Maryland; and as principal, at St. Peter and Paul, Chicago.

From 1962-1965 Sister was assigned a totally different task from teaching – doing clerical work in the school office at Villa Joseph Marie High School, Holland, Pennsylvania. Having earned a Master's degree in Business, Sister Constance was assigned to teach in the business department of Maria High School in 1971. Thus she included high school students in her ministry, directing them into future careers in business. Besides being an excellent teacher, Sister was a role model for her students: a perfect lady – polite, knowledgeable, and thoughtful. She taught for twenty-two years at Maria, serving as Assistant Principal from September 1985 until May 1987.

Her family was very dear to Sister Constance, and she was blessed to have her sister, Sister Mary, at her side in later years. We thank you, Sister Mary Constance, for sharing over 60 years of faithful service to God and God's people.

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