

Sister Mary Kostka Martinka, CDP, celebrates a warm and remarkable 100th birthday

SAN ANTONIO – Sister Mary Kostka Martinka, CDP, celebrated her 100th birthday July 18 with a Mass of thanksgiving celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Patrick Zurek at the Annunciation Chapel at Our Lady of the Lake Convent.

The liturgy, which featuring singing in Czech, was followed by a lunch and birthday celebration, complete with a huge birthday cake, in the dining room at the Convent Center.

Sister Dianne Heinrich, CDP, a councilor for the congregation's generalate, gave welcoming remarks prior to the start of the liturgy. "I am in awe and wonder in which the way God has walked with and attended to Sister Kostka," she said. We celebrate with hearts full of gratitude."

She recalled how just the evening before Sister Frances Lorene Lange, CDP, had discussed the following day's festivities with Sister Kostka, who replied, "If God gives it to me."

"Sister Kostka lives every day as a gift from God and not a given," said Sister Heinrich, speaking directly to the guest of honor. "We pray that God continues to care for you and watch over you. Yes, God saw that it was good to give you this day. Let us rejoice and be glad."

Sister Kostka was born on July 18, 1906, and has lived 79 of her 100 years as a professed Sister of Divine Providence.

In his homily, Bishop Zurek spoke of the nun's life of dedication to God. "I can only imagine all the memories you have of the presence of God in your life," he said, looking at the honoree seated in her wheelchair. "Sister, we give gratitude to God for you and we are grateful for the fact that you are a Sister."

The bishop shared some of the funny and heart-touching stories he has heard from other nuns regarding Sister Kostka, and he asked the attendees to reflect on all the graces God has given everyone. "God wrote a special letter to us Sister, and it is your life," he said. "We thank him for the gift of 100 years of your life and faith."

Born to John and Annie Martinka, who were natives of Czechoslovakia, Sister Kostka was the oldest of 12 children, seven girls and five boys. At her baptism, she was given her mother's name, Annie. Two of her sisters, Sisters Rose Marie and Elizabeth Marie, now deceased, were also Sisters of Divine Providence. The family lived on a farm near Granger, where life on the farm required the help of all the children, each assigned certain chores. Young Annie's assignment was to help her mother in the kitchen, preparing meals for the large Martinka family. The children attended Sts. Cyril and Methodius School in Granger, a school opened by the Sisters of Divine Providence in 1901. The children always had high regard for the Sisters. Sister Kostka remembers the day she took fresh milk to the Sisters (the Sisters lived mainly on what the village people brought them), and Sister Canute Frydek gave little Annie a red rosary.

Annie Martinka entered the congregation in 1925. She received the name of Sister Mary Kostka when she entered the novitiate, and she made her first profession of vows as a religious in 1927. Her first assignment as a Sister was at St. Cecilia's Parish in the rural town of Broussard, La., where she cared for the Sisters as community cook. In her early years "on mission" modern-day appliances did not exist. She recalls cooking on a wood-

burning stove and scrubbing clothes outside on a washboard and then boiling the clothes in a big kettle.

Sister Kostka has served in ministry in Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Through the years of community service and meal preparation for Sisters and, at times, for students, Sister Kostka became an expert baker. Many a Sister of Divine Providence has enjoyed Sister Kostka's delicious cookies during her years as the "cookie artist" at Our Lady of the Lake Convent. She has been a living testimony to excellence in service as a provider of nourishment, both physically and spiritually, to those she has served and lived with.

On her retirement from ministry "out there" she moved to Our Lady of the Lake Convent and in 1999 she moved to McCullough Hall, where she now lives. She continues in mission as a Divine Providence sister at the retirement center where she enjoys living in prayer and in community life with other nuns who frequently relive stories of life in ministry.

Sister Kostka expresses gratitude for her many blessings: her family, her CDP life, her many years in active ministry and her retirement community in McCullough Hall. She credits the Lord for letting her stay alive so long "because the pope and the priests need prayers."