



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Melvina Pausina, SSND
Teacher, Mentor, Community Caretaker**

Chatawa, Mississippi – At 106 years of age, Sister Melvina was the oldest of the several thousand member international congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Her mother, Anna Stipelcovich, who tended sheep in Croatia, fell in love with Gaspard Pausina. Gaspard went to America first and Anna followed. Then they married. The Pausinas established their home on Olga, an island in the Mississippi River. Four boys were born to the Pausinas in the early years of their marriage. Then finally, a girl, Anna, was born. The sixth child, also a girl, was named Zorka. It was Zorka who was to become Sister Melvina.



Sister Melvina related the following, “When they took the child across the river by boat to be baptized, the priest did not understand the broken English of my parents or God-parents. He named me ‘Anthony’ for my God-father, thinking I was a boy.” One can clearly read the Certificate of Baptism: *This is to certify that Anthony, child of Gaspard Pausina and Anna Stipelcovich, born on January 12, 1911 was baptized according to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church.*

When Zorka was just two and a half years old, Gaspard died. Mrs. Pausina must now support her seven children. Six of children she placed in the care of the School Sisters of Notre Dame at St. Joseph Orphanage in New Orleans. The Sisters helped the mother by taking Zorka with the others. Though puzzled by her baptismal certificate, the Sisters called her Antoinette. Antoinette was younger than the children usually accepted at the orphanage, so the Sisters found place for her at the nearby Daughters of Charity’s St. Vincent Home.

Antoinette lived and started school at the orphanage. Antoinette continued elementary school at St. Louis Cathedral School taught by the Teresian Sisters.

Seven years after Gaspard Pausina’s death, another Croatian immigrant, John Rudez, married Anna Pausina. Shortly after they were married, John told ‘Mama Anna’, “Come to Olga and bring the children.” Melvina related, “On Olga we were all happy and free. The whole family was now together and lived on Olga for the next three years. John then sold the store he owned, and the family moved to New Orleans. Soon after this Olga was destroyed by one of Louisiana’s hurricanes.”

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In New Orleans, Antoinette and her older sister, Anna, found good jobs in the French Market Bakery. Antoinette worked there for three years. In 1929, Antoinette became a candidate. After a year of service at the orphanage, Antoinette joined the candidates at Sancta Maria in Ripa in St. Louis.

The family, though frequently separated by circumstances, were very devoted to one another. When it was time to receive a new name along with the habit of the congregation, Antoinette implored her superiors to be named Melvina. This saint's name was the closest she could find to that of her brother's Croation name 'Miljenko.' Following the year in the novitiate, Sister Melvina took her vows in 1932.

Sister Melvina was missioned to assist in the candidature at Ripa. She shed copious tears of disappointment at not going out as the other newly professed did. She must have been well placed in the assignment for after six years as 'house-mother' and assistant with a firm, but empathetic approach in the candidature she skillfully undertook similar assignments for many of her years of active ministry. She is probably most fondly remembered for her 13 years of caring for the boarders at St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa.

Somewhat similar care of boarders was her responsibility at Madonna Manor home for children and at the Institute for the deaf. She also assisted in the classroom at these two Marrero, Louisiana facilities, Sister Melvina taught primary children for more than 20 years in Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas.

Invitation to Rome's Generalate Jubilee Program in 1978 gave impetus to Sister Melvina's long held desire to visit her family origins in Croatia. With her own sister, Anna, and her cousin, Marie, she left New Orleans in late May 1978. Fifty years after her profession, Sister Melvina returned in 1982 to assist the staff at St Mary of the Pines. Her dailiness always included the Sacraments, multiple rosaries, and reading of both spiritual and current affairs. The sisters who lived with her can share fascinating stories of Melvina's prayerfulness, her self-scheduling, her exactness in performing duties, her crocheting, and her prolific correspondence. None of the tales are more absorbing than are the accounts Melvina related herself. Some lost history of Chatawa can be retrieved in the vignettes Sister Melvina recorded. On a lighter side, Sister Melvina so enjoyed some treats in life--- her bingo games with multiple cards, fried chicken and chocolate. Sister Melvina was as remarkable in her aging as she was in the rest of her life. She was mentally agile through her last days. And for a person whose heart was weak at nine years of age, she maintained physical agility too---well into her 90s.

Melvina loved celebrations. Being the center of a great one in 2011 thrilled her. For her hundredth birthday, The Governor of Mississippi honored her with a State Commendation. The local press celebrated her on the occasion; the community relished her enjoyment of their party for her. Pausina and Stipelkovich cousins were here too.

Sister Melvina's physical decline was rather rapid after the celebration. During the last two years, she was mostly bedridden; she could still communicate during the last days. Sister Melvina died very peacefully at St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Miss. on February 25, 2017. May she rest in peace.

Memorial contributions may be made to the School Sisters of Notre Dame Retirement Fund, c/o Resource Development, PO Box 227275, Dallas, TX 75222-7275 or online at www.ssndcentralpacific.org/Partner/Donation.