

# Toronto one step closer to getting its first saint in Sr. Carmelina Tarantino

Toronto takes a major step toward claiming its first saint on Oct. 20 with a Mass to close the initial stage of investigation into the possibility of canonizing Sr. Carmelina Tarantino.

Cardinal Thomas Collins will preside at the Sunday Mass, which will mark the end of the archdiocesan phase of the saint-making process. From there, the cause for Sr. Carmelina, who died in 1992 at age 55, goes to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, where Passionist Rev. Cristiano Massimo Parisi will become the postulator arguing for her canonization.

If officials at the Vatican decide Sr. Carmelina lived a heroically holy and Christian life, she will be deemed venerable. Upon verification of one miracle attributable to prayers directed to Sr. Carmelina after her death, she may be declared blessed. The road to canonization opens with verification of a second miracle.

Sr. Christine Minicucci, superior of Toronto's Passionist Sisters of St. Paul of the Cross, is grateful for the opportunity people had through the archdiocesan phase to testify to all the ways Sr. Carmelina helped them.

"It was the best in the sense that the people got to express what they felt about Sister," Minicucci said.

For 23 years Sr. Carmelina occupied a hospital bed in Room 306 West of what was then the Riverdale Hospital, today known as Bridgepoint Active Healthcare. Lineups would form along the hall outside the invalid sister's room, where she lay immobile and in pain. They sought advice and a sympathetic ear from the simple Italian immigrant with a Grade 5 education.

"The refrain of her life was that she was totally given to God and that she accepted her condition – and she was able to live it and share with other people," said Minicucci, who served on the historical committee for the Archdiocese of Toronto investigation into the life of Sr. Carmelina.

From domestic abuse to addictions to child poverty to crushing loneliness, Sr. Carmelina seemed to have answers for thousands of Italian immigrants who had poured into southern Ontario from the 1950s through the 1980s.

"She was an immigrant herself. So she ministered to the people who were immigrants – they were mostly the Italian community, not to say that other people did not come to see her," Minicucci said. "But mostly for spiritual

guidance and direction, Sr. Carmelina was a beacon of light for them back then.”

Carmelina Tarantino was born in farm country north of Naples in 1937, the eighth of 11 children. In 1963, as a young woman, she began experiencing a mysterious pattern of pain that stumped Italian doctors. By 1964, her brother Tony persuaded the family it would be a good idea for Carmelina to immigrate to Toronto, where he and several of her brothers were already established.

But Canadian doctors were just as stymied by Carmelina’s condition. They suspected a rare cancer, but could never come up with a definitive diagnosis. She eventually lost her left leg, amputated at the hip, and went through a mastectomy. Her deteriorating condition and her need for morphine to control the pain landed her in hospital where doctors expected she would last a few more months.

In hospital, she met Passionist Rev. Claudio Piccinini, who enrolled her in the United Society and its Teopoli Catholic Catholic Spiritual Centre in Gravenhurst, Ont.

Under Piccinini’s direction, she began keeping a detailed, spiritual diary. By 1977 she revealed to Piccinini that she would like to become a Passionist Sister.

Canon law would normally prevent anyone with such serious physical limitations from entering religious life, but Vatican permission was eventually secured for her to take vows.