

Crowd turns out for 100-year-old

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

WEBSTER — Weekday afternoons, especially in the chill of December, tend to be rather quiet on Longview Drive. So Agnes Slack chuckled as she pondered what some neighbors must have thought upon seeing so many cars parked at her house Dec. 2.

Even though a formal party for her wasn't to be for another five days, who could resist giving birthday greetings on the actual day she turned 100?

Certainly not Slack's relatives who flew in from Alabama and Florida, including her godson whom she hadn't seen in more than 30 years. Certainly not the boys from down the street, who appeared at her door with homemade birthday cards — earning them big smiles and kisses from the honoree.

"I hear you've been receiving more people than the pope receives," Father Charles Latus, pastor of St. Rita's Parish, told Slack as he popped in for a late-day visit.

Slack had her own usual lively wit going that day, asking one visitor "Do you think I'll make it another 100 years, that I'll get to 200? Well, I'll look forward to that!"

Born Agnes Kerwin, Slack was the ninth of 14 children. She grew up in Parma Center and attended St. Leo's Parish in Hilton. At age 17 she married John Slack. They settled in Rochester where they raised their son, John Jr., and daughter, Eleanor.

"I would like to have had four or

six children. But you know what, I just took what God gave me," Slack remarked.

During their half-century in the city the Slacks moved several times, but always within close range of their parish, Corpus Christi. Agnes worked for 16 years at R.T. French Co. when her children were older, and was also active in several parish and community groups. Eleanor Slack recalled that both her parents served as air-raid drill wardens during World War II. "They'd go out and put their helmets and gas masks on, and patrol the neighborhood," she said.

Agnes Slack said she struggled with her family's 1971 move to Webster. But she credits her good friend Father John Reif, former longtime pastor of St. Rita's, with helping her adjust. Since then many St. Rita's staff members have developed friendships with her; among her birthday visitors were Father Latus and Sister of St. Joseph Judy Whalen, pastoral minister at St. Rita's. Father Reif, now the parochial vicar at Holy Cross in Charlotte, gave her Communion that day as well.

Slack's husband died in 1992 at age 94, and she has now outlived all her siblings. But both her children — John is 81 years old and Eleanor is 75 — continue living with her. Remarkably, except for a 17-year stretch by John in the 1940s and



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Agnes Slack (right) gets a warm birthday greeting Dec. 2 from her niece, Joan Dowdell of Spencerport. Slack spent the day celebrating her 100th birthday with close friends and family at her Webster home.

1950s, both kids have resided with their mom their whole lives.

"(My parents) took care of us, so it's our turn," John explained. "We just happen to be in a situation where it's no problem. In fact, it's better."

Over the years Agnes Slack has been close with neighbors as well as family. Among the many children who have visited with her, one boy in particular stands out.

"He learned the rosary. He used to sit by me while I said it," Agnes Slack said, noting that the boy and his family later converted to Catholicism.

Eleanor Slack said her mom is in remarkably good health; however, a hip problem has kept her largely confined to the house for several years. Agnes Slack continues practicing her faith by watching 8 a.m. Mass each day on the Eternal Word

Television Network.

"EWTN, that's her church," Eleanor Slack said. "Seminarians that she sees on TV who become deacons and then priests — she knows all of them, she knows their names. She gets worried about them if she hasn't seen them in a while."

Agnes Slack said her caring ways extend to many other people. "I pray for everybody on the street, and I pray for all God's children," she stated.

She plans to keep up her prayers, and her many social encounters, for a good long time. "I don't feel old. I'll always be young at heart," she said.

That's good news for folks who came out to see Slack on her big day.

"You have so many friends, people who love you," Sister Whalen told her.

"Well, I love them too," the birthday girl replied.

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