News
Religious Life



In this photo released by LongeviQuest, Sr. Inah Canabarro, 115, puts her hands together in prayer in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Friday, Feb. 16, 2024. (Carlos Macedo/LongeviQuest, via AP)

by Associated Press

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Sr. Inah Canabarro, a Brazilian nun and teacher who was the world's oldest person, has died at 116, her religious congregation said.

Canabarro died Wednesday at home of natural causes, said her Teresian nun congregation, the Company of Saint Teresa of Jesus. She was confirmed in January as the world's oldest person by LongeviQuest, an organization that tracks supercentenarians around the globe.

She would have turned 117 on May 27. According to LongeviQuest, the world's oldest person is now Ethel Caterham, a 115-year-old British woman.

Canabarro said her Catholic faith was the key to her longevity, in a video taken by LongeviQuest in February 2024. The smiling Canabarro can be seen cracking jokes, sharing miniature paintings she used to make of wild flowers and reciting the Hail Mary prayer.

"I'm young, pretty and friendly — all very good, positive qualities that you have too," the Teresian nun told the visitors to her retirement home in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre.

As a child, Sr. Inah Canabarro was so skinny that many people didn't think she would survive into adulthood, Cleber Canabarro, her 84-year-old nephew, told The Associated Press in January.

Her great-grandfather was a famed Brazilian general who took up arms during the turbulent period following Brazil's independence from Portugal in the 19th century.

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She took up religious work while she was a teenager and spent two years in Montevideo, Uruguay, before moving to Rio de Janeiro and eventually settling in her home state of Rio Grande do Sul. A lifelong teacher, among her former students was Gen. Joao Figueiredo, the last of the military dictators who governed Brazil between 1964 and 1985. She was also the beloved creator of two marching bands at schools in sister cities straddling the border between Uruguay and Brazil.

For her 110th birthday, she was honored by Pope Francis. She was the second oldest nun ever documented, after Lucile Randon, who was the world's oldest person until her death in 2023 at the age of 118.

Canabarro took the title of the oldest living person following the death of Japan's Tomiko Itooka in December, according to LongeviQuest. She ranked as the 20th oldest documented person to have ever lived, a list topped by Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 at the age of 122, according to LongeviQuest.

"Her long and meaningful life touched many, and her legacy as a devoted educator, religious sister, and a supercentenarian will be remembered with great admiration," LongeviQuest said in a statement.

The wake for Canabarro will take place on Thursday in Porto Alegre, the capital of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, her order said.