

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER PATRICIA COLLINS May 27, 1932–April 6, 2017

Living religious life is “going all-out for God.” That was the way 18-year-old Pat Collins expressed it. So from outstanding high school debater, to excellent teacher, to high-rise manager, to Ursuline guardian of estate, to development assistant for the Little Sisters of the Poor, Sister Patricia Collins experienced a wonderful variety of ministries in her “going all-out for God.”



A Pittsburgh native, Pat graduated from Elizabeth Seton High and entered the Sisters of Charity as a member of the well-known 1950 Holy Year group. She left behind a loving family, her parents Alice Catherine and John James Collins, and three brothers, George, Donald, and John James, Jr. Her parents and her dear brother George preceded Pat into eternity, along with two siblings Jack and Margaret who died quite young. Don and his wife Pat and Jim and his wife Audrey have remained close to their sister, visiting her often, sometimes with their families.

Pat chose the Sisters of Charity because “I like their spirit of simplicity.” Father George Haber, who taught her at Elizabeth Seton, wrote her recommendation and he said, “Her intellectual qualifications as well as those of character and personality are top grade.”

Pat, now Sister Patricia, attended classes at Seton Hill University, earning a B.S. in elementary education. At Duquesne University she earned a Master’s degree in history. Throughout the years, she attended many workshops and classes seeking to pass on new ideas and learning to her students.

From Tucson, Arizona, to Saint James, West End, Sister Patricia put her teaching skills to work in elementary schools for 14 years. With a degree in

history, the move into high school for the next 16 years gave her the opportunity to use her skills at St. Anselm, Swissvale, and then at Sacred Heart High School. It was there that she and Sister Mary Brenda Helis introduced an innovative program, sponsored by Carnegie Mellon University, in which American history and American literature were dovetailed in a team teaching and learning concept.

Students felt her influence beyond the classroom. One who stayed in touch long after eighth grade, St. James, West End, wrote that he remembered her playing baseball with the neighborhood kids—touching his life even outside the classroom. Another student from Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, Greensburg, said that Sister Patricia’s influence led her to follow and to become a teacher also.

In 1981, Sister Patricia moved to a different ministry as high-rise manager for Christian Housing, along with Sister Brenda Helis, at Saint Therese Plaza, Munhall. When the sisters left Saint Therese in 1990, the director, Sister Coleman Conroy, O.S.F., wrote: “You created a beautiful spirit among the people; you were extremely dedicated to this perpetual joy; and the management was just excellent.”

In 1990, Sister Patricia began a year of studies at Allegheny General Hospital for a certificate in clinical pastoral education (CPE). This qualified her to work as Legal Guardian of Estate for Ursuline Services. For 16 years, she dealt with many different kinds of individuals, helping them especially with legal and financial concerns, and she wrote about her work and her clients this powerful statement: “Even though every day doesn’t bring success, every day is a ‘mighty effort’ to succeed. . . . The effort to help a person who cannot help her/himself is in itself a reward. And while I do it, I hope to bring to the people an extra sense of the Divine.”

From 2007 until 2010, Sister Patricia worked and greatly enjoyed her position as a development assistant for the Little Sister of the Poor, Benton Avenue, Pittsburgh.

In May 2010, Caritas Christi became her new permanent home. Serious illness had occurred which had continued to affect her, although she had improved significantly with rehabilitation programs of two Pittsburgh hospitals. Her patience was admirable.

From here on over the years, she used her abilities with a willing and generous spirit, supported by prayer, care, and presence of many friends, including Sisters Francis de Sales and Sister Mary Brenda. Her pleasant nature and determination led her to participate in varied community activities in the house, from visiting the sick and switchboard service to tasks like “Books for Babies” and mailing projects. She loved seeing the sisters and her family, reading, and watching the news. She never forgot her roots in religion and history; her mind was ever curious, and Lake Erie was her favorite “get away” spot.

Now illness may allow us time, but not always with ease. So as Sister Pat approached her mid-80s, activity had to decrease for her. She graciously accepted this step in life and was very grateful to anyone who helped her, even in the smallest way. We say with fervor, bless you, Pat; we thank you for your life—for being a woman motivated by Mother Seton’s example and our Heavenly Father’s love. Rest in peace—you have completed your earthly journey and we will miss you. And you did achieve that biblical goal (Psalm 90):

*70 is the sum of our years
And 80, if you are strong.*

Pat, you were strong. . . . a model of strength, courage, patience, perseverance in pursuit of the goal. Rejoice now in the presence of God forever!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Mary Brenda Helis
April 8, 2017*