



Eulogy of Sister Mary Paul Francis Bailey, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 5, 2018

Blanche Elizabeth Bailey entered this world on July 21, 1926, as second of three children born to Earl and Ann Wanuka Bailey of Springfield, Ill. Her mother was of Polish descent. At the age of 16, her mother ran away from the family to whom she had been sent to live and found work at the Nurses Quarters at Great Lakes Naval Training Station. There she met Earl, who was in the Navy, and they eventually married on the naval base.

Blanche's father worked as a machinist after leaving the Navy and moved the family to Chicago to find better employment. Blanche's sister Virginia died of pneumonia and diphtheria at the age of four. Although Blanche fell ill and was not expected to survive, she beat the odds. Her brother Earl, Jr. was only 11 months younger than Blanche, earning them the nickname "Irish Twins." He died in 1997.

After attending public school in the primary grades, Blanche was enrolled in fifth grade at St. Vincent Grade School. More than anything, Blanche wanted to attend The Immaculata, but tuition was an issue. Despite earning the highest scores on scholarship tests, the scholarship was awarded to a girl whose father was deceased. Blanche spent the summer babysitting five days a week. Along with saving every penny of gift money, she was able to earn enough for tuition, a school uniform, and transportation costs. Her mother jokingly commented, "She is a real tightwad. In fact, she is so tight she squeaks when she walks."

Despite the initial disapproval of her non-Catholic father, Blanche entered the congregation in September of 1944, but withdrew in November due to extreme homesickness. In time, she settled into her old way of life. However, thoughts of Mount Carmel never left her. Eventually, feeling that she had matured enough to commit to a religious vocation, she wrote directly to Mother Mary Josita Baschnagel to ask permission to re-enter, which she did on Sept. 8, 1947. Blanche received the name Paul Francis upon her reception on March 19, 1948, professed her first vows on March 19, 1950, and lived 70 years as a BVM.

"I really loved my years of teaching," Paul Frances commented. "I taught all the grades from kindergarten up to bank presidents in college." She served 15 years as an elementary school teacher and was missioned at St. Aloysius in Kansas City, Mo.; Holy Rosary in Milwaukee; Holy Cross and St. Tarcissus in Chicago; St. Joseph in Rock Island, Ill., and Immaculate Conception in Clarksdale, Miss., where she also taught high school typing and shorthand. Teaching shorthand at LaSalle High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, completed her secondary experience.

In 1968, Paul Francis transitioned to the college level. She was an economics professor and a student loan officer at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa. She worked 19 years as an assistant professor of economics at Mundelein College and Loyola University, both in Chicago, and continued to serve as an adjunct professor at Loyola after her retirement. As an educator, she was organized, efficient, detail-oriented and creative. A former college student sang her praises. "Sister Paul Francis is a superb teacher . . . [She] has a way to make the principles of basic economics come alive and incredibly interesting. She never stops even for a minute and there is never a dull moment in the class . . . [The college] is very fortunate to have such a fine teacher on the faculty."

Paul Francis reminisced about her missions during an interview several years ago. "I had volunteered for what was then called the 'colored missions,'" she recalled. "I loved teaching in Clarksdale. So many were able to go on

to college. One of my little students made an amazing discovery after several months. She said to me, 'Sister, is you white?'" Continuing, she commented, "It is hard to pick a favorite mission. Each one had something wonderful! But, I guess I liked Clarke University the best. I felt the presence of Mary France Clarke there."

Paul Francis retired to Wright Hall in 1998 and moved to Mount Carmel in 2007. A "Sister Spotlight" in the fall 2011 *Currents of Change* reads, "Her Halloween costumes are legendary, and she participated in the wellness program and activity projects like knitting caps for the local poor and making t-shirt diapers for babies in Madagascar and other underprivileged countries. She can be found folding sheets in Marian Hall, working at the switchboard, driving other sisters to appointments, ministering at Mass, and writing letters for others. She is a prayer partner, member of the Hunger Fund Committee and takes classes at Mount Carmel Roberta Kuhn Center. Though she usually has a twinkle in her eye, Sister Paul Francis is reflective when she says, 'My philosophy of life is to live with integrity, faithful to my vows, walking with gratitude in the love of God, serving him as a Sister of Charity, BVM.'"

The article did not mention how Paul Francis, herself recuperating in Marian Hall in 2009, companioned her dying set member Sister Margaret (Peggy) Keefe (Paul Leone). Peggy had a passion for reading, but failing health made reading difficult, if not impossible. Paul Francis read to her, sharing both spiritual readings and fiction. Forever loyal to her family and friends, Paul Francis always found ways to express her love and appreciation for them.

Sister Louise French beautifully honored Paul Francis on her golden jubilee, writing, "You, Paul Francis, live a life freely given to the service of others. You resonate with people. Yours is an other-centered life, a life of unbounded charity. You respond without fanfare to every request, every appeal . . . Yes, you are the epitome of a real community woman. You know no stranger; you turn strangers into friends. Your capacity for friendship is manifest in a wide circle of diverse friends to whom [you give] of [your] bodily energy, your mental acumen, and most of all, your large human heart. Paul Francis, you truly incarnate the love of Christ."

Paul Francis' poem about the potter was printed in the program for this morning's wake. This verse readily flows from the reading from Jeremiah: "Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do to you as this potter has done? Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hands." Paul Francis lived her life aware that the Potter's nimble fingers were fully in control. Every joy, sadness and challenge was the touch of the Potter forming Paul Francis into a beautiful vessel—a woman of prayer, compassion and love. We love you, Paul Francis. May you rest in peace.