



## **Eulogy of Sister Paulina Sullivan, BVM**

Caritas Studio, Dec. 16, 2020

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Paulina Sullivan.

Helen Patricia Sullivan entered this world on May 3, 1925, joining a sister Margaret as the second of two daughters born to John and Mary Donnelly Sullivan of Kansas City, Mo. Their father worked in road construction and would come home after a week on the road covered in dirt. Helen confessed, "Fussy little girl that I was, I wouldn't hug him until he got cleaned up." When her father died, her mother found her first paying job to keep her girls fed, clothed, and in Catholic schools. Helen attended Holy Name, a Dominican grade school, in Kansas City, but graduated from the St. Aloysius, the BVM high school.

Helen entered the congregation with her cousin Mary Gertrude Hagerty, soon to be SM Gabrielle, on Sept. 8, 1942, in the midst of World War II. "There were only 29 of us," recalled Helen. "They called us 'the set that nobody prayed for!' I was very unhappy and homesick as a postulant. When my mother came to visit I begged to go home, [but she] thought I should stay. The postulant mistress, Sister Mary Angelice Sullivan, said, 'Nobody named Sullivan is going to leave here.' She must have known I would settle down and remain a BVM." Helen received the name Paulina upon her reception on March 19, 1943. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1945, and lived 78 years as a BVM.

Paulina taught at the primary and junior high levels for almost 50 years. She was missioned at Sacred Heart and Jordan Junior High in Rock Island, Ill.; St. Thomas of Canterbury and Our Lady of Lourdes in Chicago; St. Irenaeus in Clinton, Iowa; Corpus Christi in Fort Dodge, Iowa; and Holy Name in Wilmot, Wis. She also served as principal at St. Irenaeus and as superior and principal at Holy Name. Holy Name was Paulina's favorite mission. "Two classrooms constituted the convent," she recalled. "Eventually, they added a screened in [front] porch. . . . It was a house of young sisters. We had a great group, just five of us. We were all very close and loved it."

Paulina's first mission was at Sacred Heart in Rock Island, but within two years she was changed to St. Thomas Canterbury, Chicago, due to the school's proximity to Mundelein College. "I was one of those [BVMs] on the '20-year plan,' [spending] summers at Mundelein to get my degree," she commented. "Many Sisters would come to Canterbury for summer school at Mundelein. The house sisters would give up their bedrooms for those guests." Paulina completed a bachelor's degree in history and education from Mundelein in 1960 and a master's degree in education, guidance, and counseling from Marquette University in Milwaukee in 1968.

Paulina earned a reputation for being a good educator and school administrator, a mentor for beginning teachers, and a person who demonstrated flexibility in times of change. Her longest mission was at Jordan Junior High in Rock Island, Ill., where she taught for 19 years. She arrived the year after the Rock Island Catholic schools merged to form the Jordon Catholic school system. Paulina offered stability and support through the transition and again later when the old Sacred Heart school building closed.

She had a reputation for being a strict math teacher with high expectations. Whatever her method, it worked; her students retained what they were taught. Even today, teachers at Jordon Catholic remember Paulina as an amazing, kind, helpful, friendly, positive, and caring person.

Paulina retired from teaching in 1994. For the next 15 years, she was a dedicated volunteer at Sacred Heart, working in the parish office and serving as school secretary. She worked closely with a very grateful pastor and touched the lives of many parishioners during those years. Paulina and Sister Catherina Walsh were the last BVMs to teach at Jordan Catholic. When they decided to leave Sacred Heart parish and move to Mount Carmel, the mayor of Rock Island proclaimed Sunday, May 17, 2009, as "BVM Sisters Day" in honor of their service, and that of all BVMs who ministered in Rock Island.

In 2002, a former student from St. Thomas Canterbury reentered Paulina's life when he made a donation to the BVMs in gratitude for answered prayers. He and his coworkers had lamented over the poor choices made by many of today's youth and wondered why they were different. "In my case, it was firm and loving parents and the sisters," he shared. "My good memories of my years in Catholic schools stand out in my mind even more today. I am proud of how I've lived my life and what I've accomplished and I owe more than I can ever repay to Paulina [and all the Sisters.]"

Paulina was an introvert who shied away from crowds in favor of more comfortable one-on-one conversations. In her free time, she enjoyed quilting, crocheting, and needlework. She also had a wonderful time traveling with Catherina and Catherina's mother to California, Florida, Texas, and even Canada.

Paulina was a well-organized, efficient person with a calm, easygoing demeanor who never seemed to get upset. She completed whatever task that was asked of her without complaint. She really cared about people, seeing their needs and fulfilling them without fanfare. She made a special effort to reach out and offer support to those who lost loved ones. She was hospitable and gracious and loyal to friends past and present.

Paulina wore her spirituality well, living as St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Let love be sincere . . . hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection . . . Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep . . . live at peace with all." (Romans: 12:9-10, 15, 18)

Reunited with her parents, her sister Margaret, her cousin Gabrielle, and many beloved relatives, friends and BVM sisters, Paulina now knows the peace and joy of living in the loving presence of God.