

SISTER PATRICIA BEGGY
March 17, 1931 — November 3, 2007



What are our prayers this night? This is my prayer. Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God for her moment of death. Thanks be to God for that moment last Saturday afternoon, as it became the most important moment of her life.

And—thanks be to God for the beauty of Pat’s life; thanks be to God for letting our lives intertwine, so that we know and love the single-hearted and gentle life of Pat Beggy. Her family, especially her brothers and sisters-in-law, thank God for her sisterhood among them. Her nieces and nephews thank God for their Aunt Sister Pat. And we Sisters of Charity thank God for “Our Pat.”

Four sisters were at Pat’s bedside early last Saturday afternoon. In describing her death as especially peaceful, Sister Judy spoke, “Her death was as gentle as Pat herself.” Those of us who have watched Pat’s slow deterioration over these past years welcome the news that she has finally been freed from the mysterious prison of Alzheimer’s. Yes, we thank you, God, for the freedom death has given to Sister Patricia Beggy.

In her community file is a letter from a family friend, Father Edward Joyce to Mother Maria Benedict recommending Pat to the Sisters of Charity. In the formality of the early 1930s:

“The applicant comes from a devout family in which a religious atmosphere has always prevailed. My impressions of her over the years have always been edifying. Her docile personality and her personal devotion to noble deeds, coupled with a fervent religious spirit will enhance her training as a religious.”

My first acquaintance with Pat was as Sister Maris Stella, our home economics teacher at Sacred Heart High School in the 1950s.

Our class from Sacred Heart had our 50th year reunion a few weeks ago. Several times amid the reminiscing, I heard my classmates asking about that beautiful young sister we had for Home Economics; recalling her as so sweet—which of course, she was. Some recalled how much they liked just to talk to her; and someone else would say again, “She was so sweet.”

A conversation one morning, right there in the Home Ec lab of Sacred Heart High School, might be a classic illustration of Pat’s simplicity. You see, one of the side points of interest about Pat’s popularity with these high school girls is that Pat’s brother, Jerry, was a senior at Central Catholic, the boys’ school in our neighborhood. Many Sacred Heart girls knew Jerry and his friends. This particular morning was the day after Central’s senior prom, and the faithful Sacred Heart girls, no matter how sleepy, were there in class the next morning. During home economics class, some of the girls were moaning about how tired they were and Sister asked them what time

they got home from the prom. They told her 5:00 a.m. Naïvely, Sister Maris Stella exclaimed, “Five o’clock! And your parents let you stay out that late? Where would you be till that hour of the morning?” And the not-so-naïve response from the girls was a line I’m sure they loved delivering, “Sister, we were at Beggy’s.”

Those years of teaching and community life seem to be the great ones. And then came Alzheimer’s. Who of us is to know which, in God’s mystery, may have been the great years?

Pat’s disease, which began while she was teaching computer in Chandler Arizona, was hard to recognize at first because she was young for this, in her mid-60s. In those early years, many sisters, true Sisters of Charity, struggled with Pat. We hoped so hard that what was becoming evident wasn’t really true and we tried every way to fend it off as long as possible.

When Pat left Arizona, she came to Pittsburgh—to Sacred Heart. As always, she was eager to help everybody in every way she could. Sister Harold Ann, Sister Servant, and Sister Patricia Laffey, principal, worked out a morning schedule for Pat, under supervision, to help the little children in the pre-school. Of course, she immediately won the hearts of those little children and, in time, their parents. The children wanted Sister Pat in their room all day every day. When Caritas Christi opened and Pat moved out here, parents at Sacred Heart were still asking for Sister Pat.

When we look at the span of Pat’s life, it gets pretty clear—it isn’t what she did that we remember and love. It’s who she was that won our hearts. Not what she did—but who she was that made Pat Beggy who she is. Maybe that’s all one need to say this evening.

Before I close, a more personal reflection, if I may. It was Holy Saturday morning, 2006. Pat was certainly very confused by that time and I was visiting her in Elizabeth Ann Hall. We had a good visit for how she was. I know it gave me joy. For some reason, as I was leaving, I looked her in the eye and asked her, “Is there anything you want to say to me?” She waited a bit and looked right back into my eye and struggled to speak her words, “You’re . . . good.” A moment not to be forgotten.

In one way, we say good-bye to Pat and in one way we say hello to a new Patricia, now in her fullness. Sister Patricia Beggy. Sister Maris Stella – Star of the Sea! To the very moment of her death—a calm, no matter how rough the seas around had become. The calm—this was Pat Beggy.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Mary Clark SC
November 7, 2007*