

**Sister Mary Paulus Tittler, SC**  
March 4, 1927 - July 28, 2011

In the days since Sister Mary Paulus' death, we have had many conversations of remembrance, of calling to mind so many stories about her. During one conversation, someone said, "She was so present." Last evening during our vigil prayer, it seemed that each story told another aspect of Sister Mary Paulus; none seemed to be repeated. Preparing to do this eulogy I thought, "Presence says it all."

Reviewing Sister Mary Paulus' archives file, one sees the typical record of a Sister of Charity. Shirley Irene Tittler was born March 4, 1927, a daughter, the sixth among nine children of Paul and Elsie Tittler.



Four sisters—Mary, Jane, Rose, and Sara, and one brother, John, preceded Sister Mary Paulus in death. Her brother, Ray (to whom she always referred to as Father Leo), her sister, Pat, a Sister of Saint Joseph of Baden, her brother, Robert, and many nieces and nephews mourn the loss of their sister and aunt. And so do we, her Sisters in community for 66 years. Sister Mary Paulus spent nineteen years in various missions as a teacher of first and second grades. In 1976, she came to Assumption Hall, where she served in the dietary department and three terms as local councilor. In 1990, she began a period of five years working in the College post office. From 1996 until quite recently, she served as driver, shopper, gardener—the kinds of "internal ministry" so important to the community. But the archive files do not tell the whole story.

As Malcolm Forbes once remarked, "Presence is more than just being there." In the letter recommending Shirley Tittler to the Sisters of Charity, Father John P. Manning, pastor of Saint Leo's Church in Altoona, gave a hint of the person we came to know as Sister Mary Paulus. He wrote, "As Prefect of the sodality this past year, she has given the rest of the parish, especially the young ladies, an excellent example of her practical Catholicity....Another quality I like in Miss Tittler is her ability to get along with others. She is very popular with other young people, and I see many fine traits of leadership in her dealings with others." Early on, it appears, Shirley was present and not just "there."

There are lots of synonyms for "presence." One of them is "demeanor," which, in turn connotes, attitude, manner, conduct, disposition. As we reminisced last evening, I thought, "Paulus didn't just belong to the community; the community belonged to her." The other day, one Sister said, "She saw what needed to be done and did it." Among the stories we heard last night, one recalled how Sister Mary Paulus made it a point to attend the university graduations, the Lunch with Liz events, and of course, with Sister Rosaire, her sense of responsibility for the Grotto and for the Fatima Shrine. I'm sure nobody "told" her to do these things; she saw them and she did them. She felt responsible for the community's mission at the university, even though she was never a faculty member. Yet, the faculty, the staff, the students, the administrators all knew Sister Mary Paulus because she was so present.

Another word for “presence” calls to mind is “spirit,” that is, outlook, strength, character, determination. For the past forty years, Sister Mary Paulus carried the burden of a bi-polar diagnosis, an illness which seems to have no traceable cause. Thinking about Sister Mary Paulus’ story, I came across a quotation from Helen Keller: “To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable. Paulus’ spirit was always more evident to us than her illness. Someone has said, “By accepting yourself and fully being what you are, your simple presence can make others happy.”

“Presence” also connotes companionship and camaraderie. We remember Paulus as a member of the “Rosie Posies”—the Red Hatters group here at Caritas – and her nickname “Holly Pully.” We think of her dressing up for each holiday when she worked at the post office at Seton Hill, and her collection of hats —one for every occasion. We remember her gift or humor, always able to make a quip to make us laugh. We heard last night that Sister Mary Paulus never met a stranger, and Sister Rosaire has many stories of how quickly Paulus made friends among the people on the tours they enjoyed together. Sister Rosaire was Sister Mary Paulus’ dearest friend, but we were all included in her circle.

Each time we gather to say farewell to one of our Sisters, we are struck by how much we never know about each other. Still, in spite of all the stories we can tell, we recognize the Holy Mystery present in each one’s life that we have no words for. Morris West once wrote, “Once you accept the existence of God, however you define him, however you explain your relationship to him, then you are caught forever with his presence in the center of all things.” We know how Sister Mary Paulus understood her relationship to God. At her Golden Jubilee, she wrote, “He is my all. Daily Mass and the sacraments help sustain me in religious life.”

The opposite of presence is absence. And we feel the physical absence of Sister Mary Paulus. Something is gone from our daily community. What will not go, however, is that presence that was the spirit with which Sister Mary Paulus lived her life. We have been changed by her presence.

Goodbye, dear Paulus. Thank you for being our Sister. We love you. How we will miss you!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection  
~Sister Gertrude Foley, SC  
August 2, 2011*

