Sister Patricia J. Walsh, OP
1933-2015

Sister Patricia J. Walsh, born on June 15, 1933, in Chicago, was the first of four children born to John and Patricia (Sullivan) Walsh. Her father was a city fireman and her mother, before they were married, was a comptometer operator. Sister Pat said, “Today she would have worked on a computer.”

In her autobiography, Sister Pat emphasized the family’s long relationship with St. Columbanus Parish. She wrote:

My mother was the first baby baptized at St. Columbanus Church and I was baptized there also on July 2, 1933. I attended St. Columbanus School as my mother, aunt and uncles had. We would live in that parish until the last month before I graduated and entered the Congregation.

During Sister Pat’s second year at Aquinas High School, her brother Billy died of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), also known as crib death. Sister Pat remembered how Sister Jane Ellen Allison’s words to her parents were so supportive and consoling. Sister Jane Ellen continued to be Pat’s go-to person when she needed advice, and she became her sponsor when she entered.

After graduating from Aquinas High School, Sister Pat entered the postulate on June 24, 1951, at the age of eighteen. During her novitiate year she had two sisters as Novice Mistress: Sister Edmund and then St. Patrick Jerome. In her analytical mind, Sister Pat saw the benefits and wrote, “Sister Edmund emphasized the outer practices and Sister Patrick Jerome the inner, the prayer life. [Sister Patrick Jerome] also tried to give reasons, usually historical, for the various practices. It was a good balance.”

Following profession Sister Pat was assigned to teach at St. Brigid School in Detroit for two years and then was sent to St. Bridget School in Loves Park, Illinois. During her five years in Loves Park she taught every grade except kindergarten. Summers during this period were spent studying at Siena Heights College until she received her bachelor of science degree in 1959.

In 1960, Sister Pat was assigned to Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, Illinois, to teach chemistry, physics, and general science. When she left Regina Dominican in June 1964, the school enrollment had grown to over thirteen hundred students with forty-four faculty members.

In August 1964 Pat was assigned to Mount St. Mary Academy in St. Charles, Illinois. In September the Second Vatican Council began its third session with debates on religious freedom, the Church in the modern world, and divine revelation. The Congregation was preparing for the second session of the Chapter of Renewal to which
Sister Pat had been elected as a Delegate. It was also the beginning of new “chapters” for many religious congregations. She wrote,

This time marked as much if not more change in my life as had my entrance. The changes were not only in Religious Congregations but in the world around us. John Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas. Something happened in our country that historians are still trying to explain. Second Vatican Council happened in the Church. I'm not sure that we understand all the ramifications of that either.

I lived through those times and I still had my vocation but had no real understanding of what had happened. Friends left the Congregation and friendships were lost among those who remained.

Sister Pat had already begun summer studies in philosophy to earn a master of arts degree at The Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, DC when, in 1968, she applied to study full-time for a doctorate in philosophy at CUA. Her goal was to finish her master’s program and begin immediately to work on her doctorate. In her application she said, "I think that CUA might be best for me. For one thing Dr. Doherety’s field is American Naturalism and Pragmatism and these are the philosophies we are most immersed in."

Sister Pat studied full-time at CUA for three years: 1969-1972. In her autobiography, she shared her reasons for discontinuing her studies:

What I was seeing in the Congregation were people finishing degrees and leaving. What I was seeing on the campus of CUA wasn't too encouraging. The Pope had written the Encyclical Humanae Vitae and theologians were in opposition to say the least. I was seeing some of the same destructive behavior that I had seen at our Chapter.

When she left CUA, Sister Pat returned to Illinois to begin the second phase of her teaching ministry. She maneuvered through open placement and for the next thirteen years (1972-1984) ministered at St. Joseph Parish in Homewood as director of religious education for five years; taught at Marist High School in Chicago for two years; and returned to Regina Dominican High School where she taught religion for six years. She also chaired the Theology Department.

Sister Pat had begun taking courses at Mundelein College and one of these courses was, "Religious Questions for the 21st Century." The essay she wrote contained concepts about “the feminine and the importance of symbol.” She worked out a plan to study these concepts in depth under the direction of a Jungian analyst, Thomas Lavin. She received a ministerial sabbatical from 1985 to 1986 to study under the direction of Dr. Lavin, who agreed to be her tutor.
During the sabbatical year her sister Terry introduced her to Father Thomas N. Munson who was pastor of her parish. He also was Chairman of the Philosophy Department at DePaul University. He told Sister Pat that DePaul would accept some of the credits she had earned at CUA. She immediately applied to the Study Board for full-time study at DePaul University to complete her doctoral dissertation. The year after her sabbatical she began studying full-time at DePaul University for the next three years. From 1989 to 1993, Sister Pat worked part-time and continued her studies at DePaul University.

While studying at DePaul, Sister Pat became interested in the writings of a French philosopher Crêtella on the theology of Heidegger. With the help of one of her professors, the editor of *Heidegger Studies*, Sister Pat secured a copy of Crêtella’s article, “La théologie de Heidegger” so she could translate it. Her translation was published in 1994 in *Man and World*, an international philosophical review. She hoped the Graduate Committee would accept her translation plus two additional articles by Crêtella that she planned to translate along with “a hundred or so pages of commentary” for her PhD project. Some members of the Committee approved but not all. In her autobiography, Sister Pat wrote, “The degree still eluded me.”

By 1993, Sister Pat’s life had become totally focused on her ministry at St. Benedict Parish and the Mercy Home, where she served as coordinator of religious studies for two years. Sister Pat’s mother, facing failing health, lived with Sister Pat and Sister Therese Johnson. After her mother died in 1997, Sister Pat attended St. Isidore Church in Blue Island with Sister Therese. When a pastoral associate position was announced, Sister Pat applied for the position and was hired to serve this small Polish church community that was struggling to stay open.

During her seven years at St. Isidore, Sister Pat began to experience episodes of severe headaches. In her Annals, she wrote:

> I had brain surgery in July [2000]. In November I had some kind of seizure. The doctors are not sure of the reason. I have been able to return to my main ministry [at St. Isidore] part-time.

The following year was Sister Pat’s jubilee and she was able to give the homily at the Chapter celebration in Chicago. But in her Annals for that year she wrote,

> I have been handicapped this year. I am still recovering from my brain surgery. I tire very easily from the medication that I am taking. I am still only working part-time.

In 2009, Sister Pat was diagnosed with lymphoma, which became a new challenge for her. She still had a part-time teaching position at Joliet Junior College but after a bout with pneumonia she had to stop.

During the wake service, Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, Chapter Prioress of the Adrian Crossroads Mission Chapter, said,
March 2015 Pat moved to Maria and jumped right into the life. She brought some of her mechanical toys to the Solarium on 2South at meal time for the sisters who rarely spoke. They would light up with great smiles of sheer joy at the antics and sounds of the toys.

Pat was a complex woman of joy and suffering, laughter and pain – totally committed and in love with her Dominican life of study, community, prayer and ministry.

Sister Patricia J. Walsh died on September 11, 2015, at the age of eighty-two and in the sixty-third year of her religious life.

At the wake service Sister Therese Johnson, her friend and companion since the 1970s, said, Pat was first of all a religious, intelligent and a reader. In addition she was also devoted to her family: this meant making centerpieces for her family at Christmas and making Easter baskets. She also was a loyal fan of Notre Dame, the Blackhawks and the White Sox.

In her homily Sister Mary Catherine Nolan reflected on the readings and said, Pat was a scientist, a philosopher, a gifted preacher and a clown. She used all of these gifts in her ministry. Even though the last part of Pat’s journey was pain-filled, she didn’t complain and never lost her sense of humor or her desire to party. Pat’s response to the reading from Deuteronomy that she chose for today’s reading was clearly “Choose Life.”

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1 Deuteronomy 30:15-20, John 6: 35-40
Center: Patricia, age 9, with her brother John

At the Golden Jubilee celebration, from left: Sisters Shirley Reilly, Peter Anthony Schulte, Patricia J. Walsh, Ellen Murphy, and Leona Bruck.

Right: Sister Patricia with her parents, 1967