Sister Patricia Dillon, OP
1927-2016

Sister Patricia Dillon was born on December 1, 1927, in Royal Oak, Michigan. She was the fourth of seven children born to Leo and Adelaide (Sortor) Dillon.

During the Depression, her father lost his shoe store in Royal Oak and the family moved to New York so he could look for work as a shoe salesman in Brooklyn. He eventually found a job in Philadelphia and the family settled in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania. In her autobiography, Sister Pat wrote:

My memories of growing up there are pleasant ones. How privileged I was to be part of such a happy family. With so many in the family [my brothers, Leo and Frank; my sisters Bettye, Helen, Joanne and Nancy] there was always someone to tease or play games with. I have vibrant memories of a caring father and loving mother who provided us with so many things. I could never forget vacations, one in Maine, another at the “shore” in New Jersey, and others at summer camp.

Sister Pat’s parents arranged for three of their daughters to attend St. Joseph Academy: Bettye, Helen and Patricia. The tradition of attending the Academy for high school began when their father’s sister, Sister Laurentine Dillon, was ill and was being cared for in St. Clement Infirmary. Sister Pat wrote:

Academy days for me were filled with study, friends and fun. What a joy it was also to learn to know my aunt, who helped me through many a crisis in my teenage years. At the end of her junior year, [my sister] Helen entered the community and was known as Sister Leo Ellen. By the time I was a sophomore I recognized my own vocation and asked my parents if I could enter at the end of my junior year. My parents, however, said that they wanted me to graduate, to leave the academy and to get a job before I made any final decision about entering. I was upset at the time, but I now realize that I had plenty of growing up to do, and that they made the right decision.

After graduating from the Academy in 1945, Sister Pat worked at Lake Laboratories in downtown Philadelphia until she convinced her parents she had a genuine call to religious life. On February 2, 1946, with her parents’ support, she entered the postulate. During the Reception Ceremony the following August she received her religious name, Sister Leo Ann.

The following year, Sister Pat professed her first vows on August 14, 1947, and by noon was on her way to Detroit, where she was assigned to teach at St. Lawrence School for the next four years. In 1951, she was assigned to teach at St. Henry School in
Cleveland for two years and then travelled to Grafton, West Virginia, to be among the first Adrian Dominicans to staff St. Augustine School. During the first six years she taught and the next six years she served as principal and superior. Summers during the late 1950s were spent studying at the University of Detroit, where Sister Pat received her master's degree in English in 1958.

After twelve years in Grafton, West Virginia, Sister Pat was sent to Puerto Rico, where she was assigned to teach at St. Anthony High School in Guayama for one year and then taught at Catholic University of Puerto Rico in Ponce the following year. She said she enjoyed teaching every grade “except fifth grade.”

Sister Pat returned to the States in 1967 and spent the next forty-two years ministering in three Congregation-sponsored schools: Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, Illinois; Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida; and Barry College in Miami, Florida. One of the highlights of her five years at Regina Dominican were the years she served as chaperone for students on European tours. Her partner for one the tours was Sister Jean Kathleen Comiskey. Sister Pat wrote, “Jean and I have been good friends ever since.”

In 1972, the principal of Rosarian Academy, Sister Mary Nugent, invited Sister Pat to teach English at the Academy. Her fourteen years at the Academy included many fond memories and also an unexpected challenge: Sister Pat had a brain tumor that resulted in temporary blindness. The surgery was successful, but it required an extended period of time for recuperation before she could return to the classroom. The remaining years at the Academy gave her “many fond memories of the sisters I lived with and the students I taught.”

In 1986, Sister Pat and Sister Jean went to Barry. Sister Pat taught English and worked in the English Skills Clinic and Sister Jean, who had taught at Barry before, returned to her science laboratories. Sister Pat wrote:

*Jean and I were offered a house just across the street from the University that Barry had just purchased. We accepted the offer and have lived there ever since – enjoying our cozy home, the small community and also the opportunity of being part of the larger Barry community.*

However, after Sister Pat had taught for two years at Barry, the chairman of the English department decided that all faculty members in the department had to have doctorates. This decision was the reason Sister Pat left Barry and taught at Monsignor Edward Pace High School in Miami from 1988 to 1989. During that year, she received an offer to return to Barry to serve as an administrative assistant in the School of Adult and Continuing Education (ACE). She accepted the position and continued to serve there for the next twenty-one years. This position freed her from course preparation and grades.

Sisters Pat and Jean returned to Adrian in May 2010 and shared an apartment in the Regina Residence. Sister Pat began tutoring in the Literacy Center and they both
assisted in the archives by keeping the Anniversarium updated. In her autobiography, Sister Pat wrote:

*What the future holds, only God knows, but my vocation to religious life and to the Adrian Dominican Congregation was the right choice for me and a cherished gift from God.*

Sister Patricia Dillon died on September 6, 2016, at the Dominican Life Center in Adrian at the age of eighty-eight and in the 70th year of her religious profession.

During the wake service, Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicaress of the Adrian Vicariate, shared the following remembrance about Sister Pat’s life.

*We are grateful too, that Pat chose to join this Congregation. Pat was a light-hearted woman who was a joy to be around. The sisters who lived with her told how she was the spark and that there were many happy times when she was around.*

Sisters Evelyn Piche and Myra Jackson emailed the following remembrance, which was read by Sister Carlene Maly.

*Pat Dillon was a gentle spirit who always loved to tell stories – especially funny stories about her family growing up together and her early days in the community. She loved Florida and I remember when it came time to move to Adrian, she found it very difficult to leave her home, friends, warm weather, and her ministry at Barry, etc., but she, like many others in their time, knew it was time to go. She loved Adrian right away, settling in, finding many things to do and filling her life with the many kind things she did for all around her.*

Sister Carleen Maly shared her own personal memories of Sister Pat.

*On a personal note, I was able to visit Pat in her ministry as administrative assistant in the ACE office at Barry. It was Pat who greeted students as they enrolled in their programs. She had a wonderful reputation for welcoming them, lifting their spirits and putting them at ease. I’m sure that the phrase we often heard from Pat, “I know you,” was spoken to those returning education students.*

The funeral homily, delivered by Sister Corinne Sanders, was based on the readings selected for the liturgy. What follows are excerpts of her reflection.

*It is apparent we agree that the Dillons were strong women and men who had great generosity and deep faith as they weathered hard times during the depression and cared for each other, laughed, played games and even went on vacations together.*

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1 Isaiah 43:1-4a; John 14:15-21
Isaiah’s words, “I have created you, formed you, redeemed you, called you by name and walked with you through fire and storm because you are precious and honored and I love you.” In that love, Sister Pat stepped out, sent into Mission to share the gifts given to her: teaching, discovering and living with diverse peoples, chaperoning students on trips abroad, living, praying and growing in relationship with her Dominican sisters as well as the people to whom she ministered.

When Pat returned to Adrian, already beginning to suffer the effects of early memory loss, she often greeted individuals with that same smile and the words, “I know you.”

[John’s Gospel] “If you love me you will keep my commandments and I shall ask the Father and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. That Spirit of Truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know Him, because He is with you, He is in you.” Pat Dillon knew who she was; she also knew whose she was.

May that great grace of belonging continue to be realized within us as well.
Left: Sisters Jean Kathleen Comiskey (left) and Pat Dillon at the Barry University Alumni Brunch, February 2004.

Left: Sister Helen Dillon (left) with her sister, Pat Dillon, 1985. Right: As a teenager, enjoying summer vacation.
Left: Sister Jean Kathleen Comiskey, left, and Sister Pat at the Gap of Dunloe, Killarney, March 2010. Right: During her time as an English teacher at Rosarian Academy, 1975-1980

The Leo J. Dillon family, summer of 1942, the last time they were all together, before Bud joined the Navy and Sister Helen entered the Adrian Dominican Congregation. Front row, from left: Elizabeth (Bettye), Leo J. (Bud) Dillon, Nancy J. Dillon, Francis (Frank) Charles, and Adelaide (Sortor) Dillon, and back row, from left: Helen (Sister Leo Ellen), Patricia (Sister Leo Ann), Mary Joanne, and Leo J. Dillon, Jr.