Sister Pauline Richter, OP
1933-2020

One interesting coincidence brought Sister Pauline Richter’s parents together in New Mexico. A second interesting coincidence brought her to the Adrian Dominicans twenty years later.

Mary Pauline Richter, Sister Pauline’s mother, had moved to Albuquerque from Nebraska, when Mary was about nine years old. Otto, Sister Pauline’s father, had a sister who had come to New Mexico from their native southern Illinois to be treated for tuberculosis, and a couple of the brothers had moved there with her. When one of those brothers got married, Otto came to Albuquerque for the wedding. He was the best man – and Mary was one of the bridesmaids.

The couple married in February 1933 and Pauline was born on December 10 of that year. She was baptized Anna Pauline because both of her grandmothers were named Anna, and Pauline for her mother’s middle name, but she was always known as Pauline. Three other girls – Nadine, Maxine, and Norma – followed over the course of the next fourteen years. In August 1947, two months before Norma was born, Otto died of a heart attack. He was just thirty-nine years old.

One of Otto’s cousins, Tony, stepped in to help Mary, and the end result was that the two married in January 1950. Three more children eventually came into the family: Antoinette, Sherry, and Georgia, making for seven girls in all.

Pauline and her sisters attended St. Mary’s School in Albuquerque for all twelve years of elementary and high school. The school was run by the Sisters of Charity, and they, along with Pauline’s parents, nurtured her strong Catholic faith. As early as her freshman year of high school she began thinking about a religious vocation.

That thought returned in earnest after she graduated and began working for the priest of Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque, Father Carl Hammer. One of Tony’s sisters was a Victory Noll Sister, and a visit to her in Indiana led Pauline to apply for entrance to that community. But she was rejected due to a heart murmur; the Sisters feared that their missionary work would be too difficult for her.

This turn of events led to the second interesting coincidence. Father Hammer was transferred to St. Anne Parish in Tucumcari, New Mexico, and asked Pauline to come with him as his housekeeper. She did, and hence came her introduction to the Adrian Dominican Sisters who taught at St. Anne School. “My first impression was that they were so friendly and so fun to be with,” she said in her 2016 “A Sister’s Story” video.

Pauline and another young woman from Tucumcari who did not stay an Adrian Dominican made the very long train ride to Chicago and then, via another train, arrived in Adrian on June 27, 1953, to enter the Congregation. She said in her “Sister’s Story” that they arrived quite late in the evening, after night prayer, and the first order of business was to get them something to eat. “And then the life began,” she said, when Mother Gerald put their postulant’s veils on their heads.

She was sent out as a postulant to teach at St. Edward School in Detroit, spending four months there before returning to Adrian for her canonical novitiate year. At that point, she received the habit and
her religious name, Sister Rose Angeline. Her first choice of religious name was to honor her parents, but instead she received a version of her second choice, which was Rose Angela.

After making profession in December 1954, Sister Pauline was sent to St. Gabriel School in Detroit to teach second grade, and stayed there until 1957 when she was assigned to Ascension School in Harvey, Illinois. In November 1960, in the middle of the school year, she was transferred to St. Agnes School in Iron River, Michigan, to replace another Sister, and was there until 1964. She completed her bachelor’s degree in Latin at Siena Heights College (University) during this time, in 1961.


But Sister Pauline was never especially drawn to teaching, and in 1970 she asked to leave education for health care. As a result, she went to Henderson, Nevada, to work at what was then known as St. Rose Dominican Hospital and to study at the University of Nevada.

In 1971, Sister Anne Herringer, administrator of Maria Hall, as the Dominican Life Center in Adrian was then called, asked Sister Pauline to come to Maria and serve as its first physical therapist. After some further training at Kellogg Community College in Battle Creek from 1973 to 1975, she continued her work at Maria until 1982. She made one more stop in the classroom, teaching at Immaculate Conception School in Anchorville, Michigan, from 1982 to 1984, and then was on the staff of St. Lawrence retirement community in Utica, Michigan, in 1984 and 1985. She became certified as a catechist by the Archdiocese of Detroit in 1984.

Sister Pauline then returned to her hometown, ministering in several different places in Albuquerque and, when the time came, moving in with her mother and stepfather to care for them as they aged. Tony died first in the 1990s, and Mary followed in 2004.

Her ministries in Albuquerque included being a home health aide for Alpha Nurses’ Health Care (1985-1986), being a cook for Holy Ghost Parish (1986-1989), working at St. Joseph Medical Center as a patient care technician (1990-2001, after becoming certified as a physical therapy technician in 1990 at the Pima Medical Institute), and volunteering at the Aquinas Newman Center (2001-2002). She assisted a group of Dominican Laity with their formation during her time in New Mexico.

Finally, when she began to experience some short-term memory issues, Sister Pauline decided in 2013 that it was time to return to Adrian. She died at the Dominican Life Center on May 18, 2020, aged eighty-six and in her sixty-sixth year of religious profession.

At the wake service for Sister Pauline later in the week, Sister Pat Dulka, Co-Chapter Priorress for the Holy Rosary Chapter, concluded her eulogy with these words:

Pauline was a deeply humble and spiritual person. Her spirituality grew out of several very meaningful spiritual experiences during her life. Her prayer life and devotion to the Holy Spirit were deepened by her experiences in Cursillo and then the Charismatic movement. It also connected deeply with her crowd of the Holy Spirit. She had a very well-rounded personality.

Pauline completes her autobiography with these quotations that reveal her spirituality:

“O Holy Spirit beloved of my soul, enlighten me, guide, strengthen me, console me. Show me what I am to do and command me to do it.”
And from Catherine of Siena’s prayer, “O Eternal Triune God, be with me always!”

May you rest in peace, Pauline.

Sister Rose Ann Schlitt began the funeral homily – in which she called Sister Pauline “a devout daughter of the Southwest,” with her early devotion to Mary and call to religious life – by exploring the readings Sister Pauline had selected: Philippians 4:4-9 and John 15:16-18 and 26-17.

Throughout her lifetime Sister Pauline must have read and re-read these favorite verses in the Gospel of John from the last discourse of Jesus to his disciples. I believe she heard Jesus talking to her through them, giving her both affirmation and a framework for her vocation and mission: “You did not choose me but I chose you and I appointed you to go and bear fruit.” and “My Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name … so that you may love one another.”

In Paul’s missionary exhortation to the Philippians she discovered HOW she was to follow Jesus and stay the course. She heard: rejoice in Me, be gentle, not to worry, ask and pray, give thanks, keep on doing what you’re doing, and the God of peace will be with you. She had a lifetime doing her best to practice these counsels.

I must acknowledge I did not know Pauline well – in fact not until she approached me two years ago to ask if I would be willing to give her funeral homily. I was surprised and touched. She shared her autobiography and spirituality with me which I came to appreciate as her unique vocation story. Her journey in faith and fidelity would have many ups and downs along the way. I see her journey as an intentional application of these readings she selected so diligently.

… Haven’t we all witnessed as Pauline served in many roles here in St. Catherine Chapel as lector, making the announcements, and especially delighting as she led the rosary at Vespers time – while feeling ill?

In closing I think she would be so comfortable to hear words I easily imagine Jesus speaking to her now: “My beloved Sister Pauline, I chose you and you believed and followed me, alongside my mother. The Holy Spirit was active in your life as you witnessed to my Good News in many ways. Rest now and enjoy my abundant life for eternity.”