

Sisters of St. Francis

o f M a r y I m m a c u l a t e

In mid-June, 2023, Sister Pat was happily welcoming visitors to the new home she had moved to early in the year as Our Lady of Angels was preparing to close. Along with Sisters Ann Freiburg and Mary Agnes Cross, she was the first to arrive at Heritage Woods Assisted Living in Minooka, Illinois. They would soon be followed by others. The visitors Pat was so happy to see in June were the many Sisters arriving from out of town for the annual community week of meetings, missioning, and Jubilee celebrations. She was as eager to show them her new home as they were to see it. Always smiling and always hospitable...that was Pat.

Soon after those meetings, a sudden visit to the hospital for tests revealed that Pat had a malignant tumor pressing on her lungs. She entered into hospice care, lost the ability to speak, was anointed and moved from a hospice facility to Ascension Villa Franciscan Place, and died on the morning of July 18, 2023...a rapid transition from welcoming others to being welcomed home to heaven.

Patricia Mitchell was born in Columbus, Ohio, on January 11, 1933, to Frances (High) and James Mitchell. She was their first of two daughters, and Pat dearly loved her little sister, Jane. She attended elementary school at Immaculate Conception and high school at St. Mary of the Springs Academy. Experiences during her school years foreshadowed future ministry, though she couldn't have known that at the time. While in the second grade, Pat was part of a funeral service honor guard for a first-grader who died after a tonsillectomy done by the same doctor who had done hers. She said, "That raised some grateful thoughts in my small heart." While in middle school, she sang with her class for funerals at Immaculate Conception. Beginning in the eighth grade, she played the organ for funerals at her new parish, Our Lady of Peace. Later, as a young professed Sister, Pat was a teacher-organist and her tasks included preparing her classes to sing Requiem Masses for funerals. "Throughout all these experiences," she said, "I did not realize how smooth the transition would be to dealing with the dying and their families."

Pat entered the Joliet Franciscan community in 1951. As a novice, she received the name Sister René, but would later reclaim her baptismal name after the Second Vatican Council's changes to religious life. After a period of formation, she began her ministry as an elementary school teacher in Ohio, Illinois, and Florida. She then taught French in Illinois and Ohio high schools. From 1976 to 1984, Sister Pat served as an elected member of the community's Leadership Council. During this time, her responsibilities included being the Coordinator for the Sisters at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home. She described these eight years as "having the privilege of standing by many

Alleluia!



Sister Patricia Mitchell, OSF

of the great women of our Congregation as they surrendered their lives back into the hands of God."

Recognizing in herself a gift for listening and compassionate presence, Sr. Pat pursued a path of pastoral ministry that included counseling, pastoral visits to the hospitalized, homebound and bereaved. She received advanced degrees in counseling and education and developed skills for companioning the grief process with the aging, dying and bereaved. She developed knowledge of the medical/psychiatric field especially as applicable to elders. Speaking about these things, Sr. Pat said, "One of the gifts that I seem to have is to believe so much in Resurrection that it enables me to be present with death and dying in ways that surprise me."

Franciscan Sister Judy Zielinski wrote an article for St. Anthony Messenger about Pat's great "concern for families plagued by the effects of alcoholism." While working an internship at the Marian Home of Prayer in Washington, D.C., she became involved with (and in 1987, the full-time director of) the ACOA counseling program for Adult Children of Alcoholics. When asked why she chose this particular form of counseling, Sister Pat said she's "seen firsthand the peace that can come to those who finally face the truth of their past—their childhoods—in dysfunctional families. She said, "Accepting and naming the fact that alcoholism is a deep part of their family history is a tremendous release for people." Sister Zielinski ended her article by describing Pat as listening, healing, caring, and, like St. Francis, a peacemaker "bringing balm and healing to those locked in struggle."

When a blood disease made Pat's health precarious, she came back to Joliet to reside at OLA where she had previously brought so much comfort to others. Her ministry did not end. She presented her résumé to the institution and offered volunteer pastoral care ministry to residents and families, also offering to be on call to minister to the dying and their families.

(OVER)

Sister Patricia Mitchell, OSF

January 11, 1933—July 18, 2023

All of her education and experience came into play as she continued to give of herself until OLA came to an end. Pat saw herself as “midwifing people into Eternal Life.” She said the lines that passed through her head when someone was dying, the words from Handel’s *Messiah* which echo “I know that my Redeemer lives and—from my flesh I will see God,” were words that filled her with confidence, allowing her to assure the

dying persons that it was okay to let go into God’s embrace.

Dear Sister Pat, you who believes so much in Resurrection, you who have listened and accompanied others to the brink of Eternal Life, we thank you for all the days of your life spent with us as we now release *you* into God’s embrace. Alleluia! Alleluia!

<i>Born:</i>	January 11, 1933
<i>Parents:</i>	James Joseph Mitchell and Frances Mildred High
<i>Postulancy:</i>	September 4, 1951
<i>Novitiate:</i>	August 12, 1952
<i>First Profession:</i>	August 12, 1954
<i>Final Profession:</i>	August 13, 1957
<i>Entered New Life:</i>	July 18, 2023

Ministry History

1954-1955	Teacher: Grade 5, Immaculate Conception, Toledo, Ohio
1955-1957	Teacher/Assistant Organist: Grades 4, 5, 6, Music, St. Ann, Lansing, Ohio
1957-1958	Teacher/Organist: Grades 5 and 6, Music, St. Rita, Aurora, Illinois
1958-1959	Teacher/Organist: Grade 6, Music, Assumption, Pompano Beach, Florida
1960-1963	Teacher/Organist: Grades 5, 6 and 7, Music, St. Francis de Sales, Chicago, Illinois
1963-1966	Teacher: French, Religion, Bishop Ready High School, Columbus, Ohio
1966-1971	Teacher/Co-Chair Language Department: French, Sophomore Class Chairman, Christian Action Groups, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, Louisville, Ohio
1971-1973	Clinical Pastoral Minister: St. Peter High School, Mansfield, Ohio
1973-1976	Pastoral Hospital Ministry: Mansfield General Hospital and Homes, Mansfield, Ohio
1976-1984	Area Coordinator: Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet, Illinois
1984-1985	Student: St. Louis University, St. Louis, Maryland
1985-19886	Student: Pastoral Counseling, Loyola College, Columbia, Maryland
1986-1988	Pastoral Counselor: Marian House of Prayer, Washington, DC
1988-1992	Director of AOCA/Pastoral Counselor: Marian House of Prayer, Washington, DC
1992-1993	Director ACOA/ACDF: Brookland Pastoral Center/Emmaus Center, Washington, DC and Silver Springs, Maryland
1993-1996	Pastoral Counselor: Emmaus Counseling Center/Brookland Pastoral Center, Silver Springs
1996-2005	Pastoral Counselor: St. Jerome Church, Emmaus Counseling Center, Hyattsville, Maryland
2005-2011	Pastoral Minister: Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet
2011-2023	Pastoral Care Volunteer: Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home, Joliet

<i>Interment:</i>	Section 8, Lot 342, Grave 2, Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, Illinois
<i>Predeceased by:</i>	Her parents, James Joseph Mitchell and Frances Mildred High and her brother-in-law, Joseph DiSabato
<i>Survived by:</i>	Her younger sister, Jane (Mitchell) DiSabato, her nieces, grandnieces and nephews, many colleagues and friends

Rest in Peace, Sister Pat!