

Sister Patricia Ann Thompson, CSC

(Sister M. Catherine Siena)

October 23, 1925–February 9, 2021

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Mary Ellen Vaughan, CSC, who read them at Sister Patricia Ann’s funeral on February 18, 2021.

When I was invited to give this reflection on the life of Pat Ann, I was cautioned: “You could write a book on her. But please keep it to two to three pages.” I laughed. Yes, I could easily write a book on this amazing, lovable woman. So with my limited time, I leave all of you who knew Pat Ann to fill in the blanks and write your own unedited edition of her life!

Pat Ann was born in 1925, the only child of Charles and Sarah Thompson of Ojai, California. She was baptized by the Augustinian friars who staffed the parish in Ojai. She lived her first 19 years in the Ojai Valley, where both parents were involved in the citrus industry raising products for Sunkist. Her father died suddenly when she was only 5 years old. Her mother must have been a strong, capable woman for she took over and successfully managed the citrus grove until she sold it in the late 1940s and moved into town.

The Sisters of the Holy Cross entered Pat Ann’s life, after two years in public school, when she transferred to the Academy of St. Catherine in Ventura, where she completed elementary and secondary education. Because of her love for the sisters and their excellence in teaching, she chose St. Mary of the Wasatch in Salt Lake City for college. It was during her sophomore year when (in her own words) “the call to Holy Cross sounded again most clearly,” and she entered the Congregation in 1945.

Pat Ann eventually graduated from the Wasatch in 1951 with a bachelor's degree in Spanish, and later a master's in Spanish from Stanford University, Stanford, California, a skill that would shape ministry for her during the rest of her life.

Her service in education spanned 32 years: 12 in elementary in California and Washington and 20 years in secondary education in Utah and California, where she specialized in Spanish, French and English. She also served Holy Cross in many leadership ministries: Superior at Saint Catherine's in Ventura, a member of the Western Regional Council, and then Regional Superior of the Moreau Region here at Saint Mary's from 1981 to 1984. Completing that work, she participated in the Hispanic Pastoral Ministry Program at the Mexican-American Cultural Center (MAAC) in San Antonio, Texas, which set her on a dramatic new path.

Facts provide a skeleton for Pat Ann's life-journey. It's more the stories of people who knew her that put the flesh and heart and spirit into who she really was.

After her MAAC experience and deepened convictions about social justice and human rights, Pat Ann was asked to serve at St. Agnes Parish in Los Angeles, California. This proved to be a significant chapter in her life. She established the Brother André Outreach Center, distributing food to 30 families daily, a critical beginning to a center that continues to serve hundreds during this pandemic. "People came to her at all hours, seeking food or just advice," recalled Sister Karla McKinnie, CSC, who was at St. Agnes School at that time. "The people knew her as friend, mother (madre), sister. She also taught ESL in the evenings to prepare candidates for their citizenship exam. She was tireless in her efforts." It was during that period that Pat Ann's interest in

Óscar Romero and deep concern for the people of El Salvador grew into a compelling passion that shaped her mind and heart for the rest of her life. “She participated in marches in Los Angeles for the people of El Salvador against the oppressive regime,” recalled Sister Karla. “She was so passionate that she ended up being arrested on a couple occasions.”

Pat Ann’s faith was a faith that did justice. This thirst for justice dominated her life. During her last 17 years here at Saint Mary’s, she attended every Romero conference initiated by her good friend Father Bob Pelton, CSC. She also edited a number of documents Bob authored to be printed in Spanish. When her phone rang just a month before Bob’s death and she heard the familiar “Bob Pelton here,” she knew she had another job! Clearly, THE highlight of Pat Ann’s life was attending the beatification of Óscar Romero in El Salvador in 2015, thanks to the generosity of good friends.

Another way Pat Ann lived her commitment to justice was through her participation for decades in the Hispanic Committee of the sisters, brothers and priests of Holy Cross, even in later years when travel became a challenge. Pat Ann had a wonderful, wry sense of humor. She could laugh at herself. I don’t think she’d mind my sharing a memory Sister Suzanne Brennan, CSC, related to Pat Ann’s participation in a Justice Committee meeting a few years ago. The meeting was to take place in Charleston, South Carolina. Sister Mary Ann Pajakowski, CSC, was to pick up Pat Ann at the airport. Pat Ann called, concerned that she didn’t see Mary Ann at the arrivals. Turns out Pat Ann was in Charlotte, North Carolina, instead of Charleston, South Carolina. Of course, Pat Ann’s dauntless spirit and determination served well as she renegotiated her ticket to fly to Charleston.

Pat Ann possessed a unique capacity for engaging people and for continuing these relationships for the rest of their lives. Almost every person I asked to share how they saw Pat Ann mentioned the incredible number of cousins she stayed in touch with from California to Pennsylvania and many places in between. I do hope some of you are watching her celebration today because I want you to know how important you were to her and how much your communication and care mattered. She could tell detailed stories about each one of you. I attest to this because often I was the listener!

Some sisters spoke of this engaging gift, saying they did not know Pat Ann very well, but when they were with her they felt like they were her “best friend.” Many also noted her quick sense of humor that emerged in so many clever ways.

Sister Patricia Anne Clossey, CSC, recalled the humor they shared about being among the many Patricias in Holy Cross. Their bond of friendship and speaking Spanish was nurtured during Patricia’s periodic visits to Saint Mary’s from her ministry in Mexico and also their participation in the Hispanic Committee. Patricia spoke of the hospitality of those gathered in the Rosary Convent fourth-floor community room, when Pat Ann was part of the group who prayed, watched the news, did puzzles and, most of all, welcomed everyone who stopped at their door. Some of you here today know that Pat Ann continued to find a home with you long after she had moved to Saint Mary’s Convent. Hospitality was your hallmark and certainly was hers.

Pat Ann never missed a wake or funeral if it was humanly possible. On one occasion in Los Angeles, she went to a funeral and found out it was not the person she thought it was

but someone with the same name. Of course she stayed and had conversations with the grieving family and found herself with more new friends.

During the last years when she was in ministry here at Saint Mary's, Pat Ann served as Mission Effectiveness Coordinator and from 2011 to 2017 as Saint Mary's Convent librarian. The location was perfect. It was a drop-in/stop-by place for so many, whether they wanted a book or, more importantly, a conversation. The volunteers who worked with Pat Ann soon became her best friends, and those friendships lasted to her death. Terry Slamkowski, a volunteer, recognized Pat Ann as a "masterful teacher." Terry was amazed that in her 80s Pat Ann had learned a library management computer program and knew it well enough to teach volunteers how to do parts of it. Most volunteers were there only weekly and would forget details, making mistakes. "Pat Ann had this gracious way of reteaching and this lighthearted way of telling you your mistakes were easily corrected," recounted Terry. "She had a special way of making volunteers feel welcome and also invited us to Mass and lunch after our service. She was a treasure: her smile, her patience, her quick wit and her prayerfulness."

One part of her life that Pat Ann loved best was serving as great-grandmother (my title) to two families! Probably most sisters here know about Pat Ann's relationship with a Peruvian family and may have met them during their frequent visits. Victor Maquue did a doctorate at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana. He and Maybee are the parents of four delightful daughters. Even after the family moved a few years ago to West Lafayette, Indiana, for Victor to take a position at Purdue University, they returned often to visit Pat Ann. During this time of COVID-19, they talked regularly

on the phone. And the Cahill-Kelly family, regular Sunday participants at Eucharist, were part of Pat Ann's extended family. Most of you know Grace and Rose, who circled the church with smiles and greetings of peace, beginning of course with their beloved Pat Ann. And Pat Ann would light up like a Christmas tree whenever she saw any of these children and their parents. Like every faithful grandmother, she prayed for them constantly and probably has offered them a little advice along the way.

One of the last persons who spoke to me about Pat Ann was her bandmate, Sister M. Michaeleen (Frieders), CSC. It was only in these years since both had returned to Saint Mary's that they had been in contact and their relationship grew. Michaeleen was inspired as she got to know Pat Ann better and saw what a strong and positive participant she was in community life. "Pat Ann had a unique way of responding to the needs of others," recounted Michaeleen. "No matter what someone needed, she'd figure out how to take care of it with so much love and generosity." Michaeleen would visit Pat Ann and they would pray together. February 2, the Feast of the Presentation, was a very special day for both of them and their band. It was both the anniversary of their reception into Holy Cross and also their initial profession. Michaeleen wanted to mark the occasion in a special way. She had a prayer and a cake for their little group. It turned out to be their last celebration together.

In recent years, Pat Ann developed an abnormality in her brain that caused her to lose her sense of physical location at times. (Otherwise, she was clear as a bell.) On occasion, she would travel in her mind to her beloved southern California and would reminisce vividly about the experience and all the people she

encountered. Sometimes she was just convinced that she was in a different room at Saint Mary's and get upset that no one had told her she was moving. Caregivers would reassure her that all her own things were around her and she was in her room.

A few minutes past midnight on February 9, as the birthday of her dear friend Maura was ending, Pat Ann did take a trip. This one was definitely for real. She traveled to that place for which she had yearned so deeply. She didn't go just for a visit. She went to stay in the fullness of God's eternal life and to be with her parents and family and cousins and so many friends and refugees, immigrants and indigent persons she had served, and yes, of course, with her beloved Óscar Romero. She now lives in that Mystery beyond our comprehension. And I'm quite sure none of us will try to persuade her that she isn't really there!