

## **Condolences Shared at the Funeral of Sister Paula Merrill, SCN**

*By Sister Maureen McCarthy, SSSF, and Sister Elsa Paul Chiriyankandath, SSSF*

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family Members, and Friends,

My name is Sister Maureen McCarthy and here with me is Sister Elsa Paul Chiriyankandath. We are both serving on the International Leadership Team of the School Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We are here with you this evening, representing all of our sisters and associates worldwide, to express our heartfelt condolences to the Sisters of Charity and all of you gathered here to remember and celebrate the life and legacy of your beloved Sister Paula.

Sister Paula was no stranger to our congregation. Indeed, with her gentle and loving spirit, she was part of our School Sister family for all who knew her. I had met Paula at the clinic where she worked with Sister Margaret in the early 2000's when I was in Provincial Leadership and had the wonderful opportunity of visiting our sisters in their places of ministry around the United States. And I remember meeting Sister Paula again here at your motherhouse where our sisters held one of their annual community gatherings some years ago. She made us feel so welcomed among you. I know she and Margaret were close friends but more than that they were dedicated colleagues, each one so committed to her ministry among the poor and underserved people of Holmes County.

That such good women would be taken from among us in so violent a way is incomprehensible. We are all still in a state of shock. No words can ever fully express the profound sense of loss and the deep sadness we feel for what these two brave women must have endured before succumbing to death. But what can and does comfort us is knowing that the selfless service they quietly, faithfully, almost invisibly performed day in and day out is now known around the world. In their living and in their dying Sisters Paula and Margaret have given such a beautiful and strong witness of what religious life is truly about today and in every age--selfless service with and among God's people, especially those most in need, and the laying down one's life for love of one's

neighbor. This is the message and legacy Sisters Paula and Margaret leave with us to inspire and to encourage us as we continue our journey forward.

We would like to end with the words of author Clarissa Pinkola Estes. She writes: "It is a time for us to stand up and show our soul--it is a time to be fierce and to show mercy." Time to be fierce in shining a bright light on the lack of equal access to education, health care, and jobs and on the systemic impoverishment of people in places like the rural South of our country. And it is our time to show mercy toward those who have wronged and hurt us. Truly the violent death wrought upon our Sisters Paula and Margaret is a defining moment for our two congregations. We are called to stand up and show our souls, to be fierce and also to show our mercy.

May God bless and keep Sisters Paula and Margaret. May the Holy One show them mercy. May the Face of Love shine on them and give them peace, and give them eternal peace.

And may the God of mercy forgive and heal the one who took their lives, and give us all the grace to forgive this terrible wrong. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.