

Sister Carol Rigali and Sister Deborah Fumagalli, Provincial Leadership Team
School Sisters of St. Francis, United States Province

When members of our community and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth gathered together outside of Paula and Margaret's home just a few days after they were murdered, we spoke of our amazement at the number of lives that had been touched by these two women, who lived humbly and served quietly. In the days and weeks that followed, we saw even more clearly how far the witness of their lives had spread. The love and energy of Jesus, which they shared with those who were touched through their ministries, had been lifted up and shared even further, all around the world.

As our communities gathered to lay our sisters to rest, the outpouring of grief and memories and love for Paula and Margaret truly filled our hearts, helping to bring us peace and consolation. So many of the people they taught and served and helped to care for through their ministry of healing came forward to share stories of how their lives had been changed and shaped by these two remarkable and holy women. Serving the poor and those on society's margins each day, their daily acts of compassion at the clinic, in their parish, and everywhere they went were testimony to their lives of joyful, loving service.

Even in the immediate aftermath of losing our beloved Sisters Paula and Margaret through senseless acts of violence, our congregations came together and asked that we move forward together in a prayerful and healing manner. As women of faith, we focused on the loving and compassionate examples of Paula and Margaret and clearly stated that we value and respect life, even as we seek justice and truth. We trusted in God to bring peace to our hearts and to the world, and that has remained our commitment throughout these 22 difficult months.

That has not been easy for any of us. Our hearts have been broken by your actions that night, Mr. Sanders. You stole away the lives of women with whom we had grown up, with whom we had prayed, with whom we had served, and with whom we had laughed. There were so many more joyful and holy memories to be made with Paula and Margaret, and on that night of selfishness, you chose to take all of that away from the hundreds of women in our religious communities.

But even though our feelings of pain and anger and grief are justified and healthy, we also know that God—the loving God that Paula and Margaret served so faithfully throughout their lives—calls us to act with mercy. And we are here today to witness to the measure of justice that you will receive this day, Mr. Sanders, but also to call you to seek God's forgiveness for your actions.

The number of Paula and Margaret's days was cut short by your acts of violence that night, Mr. Sanders. But we are grateful that your own life will not be subjected to that same violence. In the spirit of mercy, we pray that you will use the days that you have been given to reflect on the loving examples of Paula and Margaret. We hope that you will ask the God that our sisters served so faithfully and so bravely to forgive you for taking their lives. Your actions caused so much hurt and sorrow to those who loved them, but also to those who love you.

We are confident that Paula and Margaret, who have received their martyrs' reward in heaven, are praying for you. We pray, with them, that you will walk more closely with God every day, so that the remainder of your days will reflect a true amendment of life, thanks to God's mercy.