

Sister Pat Lynch: A presence of joy for college students

Ursuline Sister Kathleen Condry tends to shy away from events with big crowds, yet Ursuline Sister Pat Lynch can always talk her into going. “Pat is a real people-person,” Sister Kathleen said. “Wherever the people are, that’s where Pat likes to be.”

Sister Pat is a natural introvert, but her ministries through the years taught her to be more extroverted so she could reach out to people. One such role was in campus ministry at the University of Kansas from 1987-94. As her role on the Ursuline Sisters of Paola, Kan., leadership team was coming to an end in 2009, she was happy to learn of an opening as the office manager/campus minister at the Didde Catholic Campus Center at Emporia State University, in Emporia, Kan.

“I’m probably not the ideal office manager,” Sister Pat said. “I’d rather be sitting and talking to people than ordering supplies.”

The people who interact with her at Didde think she is perfect for the role.



Sister Pat enjoys the picture board that details many of the events that occur at the Didde Center.



Sister Pat visits with Sister Bev Carlin, right, the vocations director for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, who lives in Manhattan, Kan. Sister Bev was visiting the Didde Catholic Campus Center as one of the leaders for the Busy Bee Retreat in early March.

the homeless. Sister Pat drove two hours round trip to Topeka, Kan., to get the supplies the students needed, Hayes-Walworth said.

“It’s a joy to come to work, it’s a soothing environment,” she said. “It’s hectic at times, and we get a lot done, but there’s a sense of calm here which you don’t find in the regular business environment.”

“She’s very welcoming,” said Father Ray May, who has been the chaplain at Didde for seven years. “You need to be welcoming, a person of faith and prayer, able to direct people, and know how to run the office. She’ll talk to students, counsel them.”

Sister Pat was a natural for the job because she’d worked in campus ministry before and had been a superior of her community, Father May said.

“Her enthusiasm for people, her faith, her ability to get things done, and her leadership ability” are just some of the skills she brings to her ministry, he said.

It’s Sister Pat’s concern for the students that most impresses Vickie Hayes-Walworth, who works part time as the financial assistant at Didde.

“Sitting and talking with people is a good trait,” she said. “She listens, she’s very concerned about the students. She’s a good guide for them. She wants them to have a good experience here and during their four years of college.”

During the second weekend of April, students at the center organized an event to raise awareness for

Emporia, Kan., is about 90 minutes from Paola, where the Ursulines had their Motherhouse from 1895 until they merged with the Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph in October 2008. Sister Pat decided to remain in Kansas to minister because of the Ursulines' historic presence, and the relationships she's built.

"A lot of people don't know the Ursulines are still here," she said. "I told myself I was open to going to Kentucky, but I found out the position was open here. In the past, I'd come here to do spiritual direction once a month and was on the staff of the Busy Bee Retreat." Retreats and spiritual direction are two of her favorite ministries, so the decision was easy.

The Didde Center was built in 1990 by Carl and Teresa Didde, and features daily Mass except on Tuesday in Saint Teresa's Chapel. It is a registered student organization, and a 15-member student council plans events for the center's use. Sister Pat is the full-time employee during the days, and four student outreach ministers take turns working in the evenings.

"We try to get the students involved when they come to campus as freshmen," she said. They have a back-to-school meal, a potluck during Thanksgiving week, and a fish fry on the first Friday of Lent. There's a taco dinner in October, and barbecue sales on Super Bowl Sunday, Sister Pat said. Once a month, there is a Mass for people with disabilities, called Chrism, and students volunteer to serve a meal at a food kitchen.

"I like to be available," Sister Pat said. "If it makes an impact, that's great. I know my presence at KU made a difference."

Emporia State, with 5,500 students, is much smaller than KU, and she has more responsibilities at Didde. "I'm wearing other hats here, but I'm available to talk."

Sister Pat is a former vocations director, and thinks potential sisters are much more likely to come from college-age women than those in high school. "Being on a college campus is important. I don't know high school kids," she said. "Even college is a little young these days. In some of the parishes, people have never seen a sister."

"It is great to see Pat back in campus ministry again because she seems so happy there," said Sister Kathleen, who has known Sister Pat since her early days in the community. "She loves the college students a lot and they love her. I know that she serves as an anchor for them, a steady and wise listener and adviser. Pat is good at enjoying people's gifts and letting them be themselves without trying to change them."

Heather Hauskins is a junior nursing student at Emporia State and the activities coordinator for the student council. She calls Sister Pat "perfect" for the college environment.

"She's very open, if you have any questions, no one is afraid to talk to her," Hauskins said. "She's not pushy, she gives you information you need, and allows you to make that decision. She's very involved with anything we have going on."

This year's Busy Bee Retreat was the first week of March, and Sister Pat was glad to be part of the staff. "It's more life-giving to me to talk about God, and what God means to me," she said. During the retreat, "students are sharing with me the effect of how God is working in their lives."

Another retreat leader that week was Sister Bev Carlin, the vocations director for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, who lives in Manhattan, Kan. She said Sister Pat is a good guide for the students.

"Sister Pat went to the Kansas Catholic College Student Convention (Feb. 11-13 in Topeka), she was present with the students," Sister Bev said. "Being present to the students, learning about their days, being part of their life is the vital part of her ministry."



Sister Pat (at the top of the stairs) attended the Kansas Catholic College Student Convention, Feb. 11-13 in Topeka, Kan., with students from Emporia State.

Kathleen (McGreevey) Warden and Sister Pat became friends at 14, when they were freshmen at Ursuline Academy, and remain close today. “Our generation grew up with priests and nuns, we had an important connection in our parishes and schools,” Warden said. “It’s unfortunate that this generation is not as lucky, they don’t connect with priests and nuns. What Pat does is show our youth of today the value of religious life. This is such an important turning point in their lives -- will they continue to go to church? She serves as that representative of our Catholic faith.



Sister Pat takes a moment in the St. Teresa Chapel in the Didde Catholic Campus Center. The chapel is named for Saint Therese of Lisieux, but spelled “Teresa” for Teresa Didde, who along with her husband Carl, commissioned the creation of the Didde Center, which was dedicated in 1990.

father or my grandmother on weekends and holidays.”

When she was 10, the bishop sold the orphanage, so she moved to a second orphanage until she was 13, about halfway through her 8th grade year. She planned to attend Ursuline Academy in Paola for high school, but she had to board with a family until she finished the 8th grade. (The bishop also sold the second orphanage). “In a way, I’ve grown up in institutions all my life,” she said.

She met the Ursuline Sisters when she went to the Academy. “Sister Virginia (Sturlich) was close to all three of us, she lost her mother when she was young,” Sister Pat said. Sister Virginia, who is 95 and retired to the Motherhouse in Maple Mount, lost her mother when she was 9, and had three younger siblings. She took care of the Academy students when they were sick, and remembers Sister Pat as “a good girl.”

Sister Pat began thinking of becoming a sister at age 7. She had experiences with three religious orders during her early schooling and orphanage years, but she did not find a group that she wanted to join until she met the Ursulines.

“There was a spirit about the Ursulines, they were loving, fun, genuine,” she said. “There was authenticity to the sisters that I had not seen before. They seemed to like each other. I finally found the group where I would fit. Sister Johanna Huettenmueller was my Latin teacher, she had a big effect on me. I had many wonderful examples.”

“She has amazing warmth, is strong in her faith, and has an unequalled joy for life,” Warden said. “That’s what the kids see. So many 18 year olds have never met a sister.”

Sister Pat said she tries to bring hospitality, simplicity, and being a witness to religious life to whomever she meets in her ministry.

“Wisdom and experience in life have given me the tools to work with people, to show them how to balance busyness and spirituality, to take time for prayer.”

Overcoming adversity

The smile that so easily comes to Sister Pat’s face is all the more remarkable considering the number of tragic events that occurred in her childhood.

She spent her early years in Pennsylvania, but when she was 3, her 6-week-old brother died, and the family moved to Kansas City, Mo., where her maternal grandmother lived. When she was 5, her mother died two days after giving birth to her younger sister, and the family moved back to Pennsylvania. At age 7, at her grandmother’s request, the family moved back to Kansas City.

“My father had to earn a living, he couldn’t take care of us. I guess my grandmother couldn’t take care of us,” Sister Pat said. She remembers being in her grandmother’s living room when some people came from Catholic Charities, and soon she and her two older sisters were staying at St. Joseph’s Orphanage in Kansas City, Mo. “My father lived down the street. We waved to him on the way to school,” Sister Pat said. “We would go home to visit my

At age 16, Sister Pat knew that when she graduated from the Academy, she would join the Ursuline Sisters. But that year, tragedy struck again when her father died.

“My Aunt Catherine said at the funeral, ‘You can come live with us,’” in Philadelphia, Sister Pat said. “She had three sons, and had a little girl who had died. She always wanted a daughter,” Sister Pat said. “One of the reasons I made the decision to stay that year was to have a normal family life.” The outpouring of support at such a vulnerable time in her life still makes her cry.

“It was hard to be away from my sister, and I missed Paola,” she said, but she knew she would return there in 1966 to enter the Ursulines.

Those were turbulent days, both in the country and in religious life, as the impact of Vatican II was beginning to be felt. The Ursuline Sisters of Paola had inadvertently launched the “habit revolution” among religious communities in 1964 by being the first group of sisters to appear in public without the habit. The ensuing firestorm became international news.

“My aunt showed me a picture in the Philadelphia newspaper about the change of habit,” Sister Pat said. “She said, ‘Is this the order you’re joining?’ When I said ‘yes,’ she said, ‘Well, what are they doing?’”

Joining the Ursulines

It was tradition for postulants in Paola to enter on July 16th, the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, but with all the controversy swirling in 1966, Sister Pat’s entry was delayed until Sept. 8, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Sister Raymond (Dieckman) was appointed our novice director. She told me to pick out some scripture passage, and share my reflection with the whole community,” Sister Pat said. “I picked Jeremiah. Ever since I’ve been with them, we’ve been changing. We carry that flexibility with Saint Angela, she built change into the rule,” she said. “Nothing is set in stone. We do whatever we need to do to keep carrying out the mission.”

Novices normally stayed in Paola to work during their canonical year, but since Sister Pat was the lone novice that year, she was sent to Marillac College in St. Louis, a formation college for sisters that closed in 1974. “I got to live in Villa Angela with the junior professed,” she said. Not long after, all the sisters were called home, and Sister Pat went to Avila College in Kansas City, completing a degree in English and secondary education in 1971.

She did her student teaching at Ursuline Academy in 1971, but that was the last year the school was open. Ursulines began the school in 1896, shortly after arriving in Paola. “I’d hoped to have a future at the Academy,” she said. “It was heartbreaking for all of us.”



Sister Pat Lynch, right, goes over a financial matter with Vickie Hayes-Walworth, who she works with at the Didde Catholic Campus Center at Emporia State University.



Sister Pat and Bill Ericson, a Lakemary Center resident, visit on Sept. 25, 2009. The former Ursuline Sisters of Paola were honored that day during the 40th anniversary celebration of the Lakemary Center in Paola, Kan. Sister Pat ministered at Lakemary for 13 years, and serves on the Lakemary board.

She was among five sisters who took classes at Avila during the day, then came home to be dorm prefects. By 1970, the population was declining and there were fewer sisters, partly because some of the sisters who taught at the Academy left the community. “Closing the Academy was sad, but it was necessary,” she said.

Lakemary Center

While the Academy was ending, the Lakemary Center was a new beginning for the Ursulines, opening in 1969. It is a residential facility for children with developmental disabilities.

With the Academy closed, Sister Pat worked at Lakemary in 1971-72 as a speech therapy aide. “I didn’t know speech pathology existed,” she said.

Sister Pat immediately fell in love with the children of Lakemary. She went to the University of Kansas to earn her master’s degree in speech pathology, and returned to Lakemary in 1974 as a speech pathologist. She filled that role until 1981, then served as education coordinator until 1986.

“Lakemary got bigger, it got better and

better,” she said. It expanded to include adult services. “It’s still serving more than 500 people with disabilities now.” While Lakemary is no longer an Ursuline ministry, Sister Pat remains on the Lakemary board of directors.

“It taught me patience,” she said. “The eight years I did speech pathology, I would be astounded to see a 3-year-old talk, because I was so unused to that. I think they are a gift to me.”

Learning to grieve

After 13 years at Lakemary, the community asked Sister Pat to become the formation director. “I said, ‘I’d like to get some training.’ I normally did the job first, then got the training,” she said. She went to a Formation Institute in St. Louis, which offered her a chance to heal that she didn’t know she needed.

“It was like a sabbatical. I was tired, but I didn’t know it,” she said. “I was trying to pray, but I was having a hard time. Thoughts of my mother kept coming to me. God was helping me heal. I thought I’d done well in coping with her death, but I didn’t know I had all this grief inside me I hadn’t expressed.”

She took a grief seminar, and her spiritual director suggested she write a letter to her mother. She couldn't write the letter. "The only memory I had of her is in the casket, or trying to climb on her lap," Sister Pat said. "My mother's family decided to have a reunion, they'd never had one before. I had a first cousin who wanted to go, I rode with her. I wanted to talk to people about my mother," she said. "It was a rainy day, I looked over my shoulder, and there was a huge rainbow."

She found out her mother was very fun-loving. She learned her mother met her father when she worked at TWA, and helped him get home.

On All Souls Day, the presider at Mass was Father Joe Gillespie, the seminar teacher on grief. He quoted a poem that was discovered written in a concentration camp: "Go out into the woods one day, and weave for yourself a wreath of memories. And when the tears obscure your eyes, know how good it is to be alive." Sister Pat wrote down the words in her bible. During that year, she said she cried in her room every night. "As I would pray, I would cry. I never felt



Sister Pat Lynch, right, talks with Amy Fisher, one of the student outreach ministers at the Didde Catholic Campus Center at Emporia State University in Emporia, Kan.

alone, I always felt God's presence. It just takes as long as it takes to mourn a loss. You have to get it all out."

"At the end of the academic year in the institute, we were required to make a 30-day retreat," Sister Pat said. "It was during that retreat that I finally wrote the letter to my mother. On Mother's Day, I took my letter to the woods, buried it, and put flowers on it. That whole year was such a gift," she said. "God wants us to be healed. When I went back to Paola, the sisters said, 'You look different.'"

Leadership

When Sister Pat returned from St. Louis ready to lead faith formation, the community's lone postulant left. "I didn't have a ministry," she said. "That's when I went to Lawrence to do campus ministry at KU."

She was involved in mostly student interaction at Kansas, working a 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. shift. "I had a bible study group and phone volunteers, and did all kinds of activities in outreach ministry."

Earning her master's degree at KU and ministering there for seven years turned her into a rabid Kansas Jayhawks basketball fan, and watching



Sister Pat was a councilor on the final leadership Council for the Ursuline Sisters of Paola. She is joined here in this Jan. 11, 2008 photo with the rest of that Council, Sister Kathleen Dueber to her right, and in the back, from left, Sister Helen Smith, Sister Jane Falke, and Sister Kathleen Condry.

their games is one of her favorite pastimes. "I was in Lawrence when Danny Manning and the miracles won" the national championship in 1988, she said.

During vocation training sessions in the 1980s, Sister Pat struck up a friendship with the vocation director from Mount Saint Joseph who was also passionate about basketball, except her "big blue" was the University of Kentucky – Sister Rose Marita O'Bryan.

“At one of the vocation gatherings, I brought Sister Pat over to Desenzano, where I was living, and she and I watched the Jayhawks of Kansas spar with another NCAA basketball team into the late evening hours,” Sister Rose Marita said. “In that match-up, Sister Pat and I were of one accord -- the Kansas Jayhawks. A match-up between UK and KU would find us both respectful and yet, cheering wildly for our respective team.”

Now having Sister Pat as an Ursuline of Mount Saint Joseph is “one of the marvels of life,” Sister Rose Marita said. “She has such a gentle and genuine spirit and she brings that gentleness and authenticity to one-on-one relationships as well as to the Ursuline project of community,” Sister Rose Marita said. “Her skills of deep listening are superb. Sister Pat has a beautiful honesty and an ability to ‘stay the course’ with the courage and hope of our founder, Angela Merici.”

While at Lakemary in 1982, Sister Pat was elected to the community’s leadership Council. She served in leadership for 22 of the next 26 years, until the Ursulines of Paola merged with Mount Saint Joseph in 2008.

She had just finished eight years as a councilor when in 1990 she turned down the request to continue serving. “I’d only been at KU a few years, I thought it was not the time,” she said. “Four years later, I felt very peaceful about saying yes to a leadership role.”

It was in 1994 that she was elected superior, a role she filled until 2002. The community had its centennial in 1995, but likely the largest effort of her tenure from the public’s perception was the renovation of the Paola Motherhouse in 2001-02.

The renovation offered some rebirth during a time of sadness. The day after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Sister Karen Klaffenbach, a member of the Council, died of lung cancer at age 42. “She was one of our bright shining stars,” Sister Pat said.

Following the end of her second term as superior, Sister Pat was elected to serve as a councilor again, and she also took on the role of director of vocation and formation ministry in 2002. In 2006, she added spiritual direction to her ministries.

“Spiritual direction was something I felt called to do,” she said. “If you’re a good listener, people come to you. I wanted to learn more about spiritual direction and also to know more about God.”

Her tenure in leadership ended with the approval from Rome that the Paola and Mount Saint Joseph communities could unite. “The decision to close the Motherhouse in Paola was sort of shocking. I will never forget our Council met with the Kentucky Council, all of us in a room,” Sister Pat said. “I knew it was the Holy Spirit present, we said we were closing the Motherhouse. The decision was a life-giving experience for us, now we have all these companions. We could not have two motherhouses. We saw it as an opportunity to share our gifts, and for them to share their gifts.”



Heather Hauskins, a junior nursing student at Emporia State and the activities coordinator for the student council at the Didde Center, brings Sister Pat a quesadilla for lunch during the Busy Bee Retreat in March.

Remarkable friend



Sister Pat and Emporia State University student Molly Campbell enjoy a moment during the Kansas Catholic College Student Convention, Feb. 11-13 in Topeka, Kan. The convention theme was “Rooted in Christ,” and featured speakers talking about how their professions are rooted in Christ.

“She’s a remarkable friend,” Warden said. Warden attends Church of the Nativity in Leawood, Kan., and said she tries to keep a low profile, but that isn’t possible with Sister Pat.

“When Pat goes to church with me, she knows everybody,” Warden said. “I tease her that I should wear a T-shirt that says, ‘I’m with Sister Pat.’ ”

By Dan Heckel

In her free time, Sister Pat likes to go to movies, and she was once involved in community theater. Her speech therapy days at Lakemary made her especially glad that “The King’s Speech” won the Oscar this year for best picture.

“Pat may seem quiet to those who don’t know her, but she is a real ham, very creative, and an entertaining storyteller,” Sister Kathleen said.

One of Sister Pat’s finest attributes is being a good friend. “She is thoughtful, sensitive, and intuitive,” Sister Kathleen said. “In the tough times, she can understand how I am feeling without my saying anything, being there with a hug or a note of support just when I need it. She is generous with compliments and expressions of gratitude, not only to me, but with everyone.”

Warden, Sister Pat’s high school friend, was a teacher for 30 years in Washington, D.C., but returned to Kansas City six years ago when her husband was dying of cancer, and she and Sister Pat reconnected. “She brought a specialness to my husband,” Warden said. Sister Pat sang at the Wardens’ wedding.