

Sister Pauletta McCarty has always been at home with the Ursulines

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Ursuline Sister Pauletta McCarty's favorite picture depicts Jesus walking with his disciples on the road to Emmaus, but they don't recognize him. "I think it's wonderful that Jesus joins us wherever we are," Sister Pauletta said. "I say, 'Jesus walk with me.'"

Sister Pauletta calls Maple Mount home these days, but that's nothing new for the sister who grew up just three miles down the road in the tiny town of Curdsville.

"I came here when I was a month old to see my aunt take the habit," she said. "I didn't go in the chapel, I stayed on a bed in the infirmary, they tell me." Her mother's sister became Sister Mary Florentia Mahoney. Sister Pauletta also had an aunt who was a Sister of Mercy, her grandfather's sister was a Sister of Loretto and her dad had a sister who was a Poor Clare Sister. Three of her cousins, the Powers brothers, are priests. "I've been around religious all my life," she said.



Sister Pauletta McCarty



From left, Father Joe Mills, Father Aloysius Powers, Sister Pauletta McCarty and Henry Lockett gathered after lunch at the Mount on Jan. 4, 2012. All but Father Mills were members of the 1935 graduating class of St. Elizabeth Grade School in nearby Curdsville.

There was never any doubt which order Sister Pauletta would choose, once she decided to become a sister. She was taught by Ursuline Sisters at St. Elizabeth School in Curdsville. Her favorite teacher was the late Sister Georgetta Higdon.

"She taught me a love for reading," Sister Pauletta said. "She did things with us. If we talked about the sea, we'd have sand and put a little water in it."

When she completed the eighth grade, Catholic students were prohibited from riding the public school bus. Her parents sent her to boarding school at Mercy Academy in Louisville for two years, but following the 1937 flood, Sister

Pauletta was very homesick and returned to spend her final two years at Mount Saint Joseph Academy. She graduated in 1939, making her the oldest living graduate of the Academy among the sisters.

She did not join the convent immediately upon graduation, taking two years before entering in 1941, one of 12 novices that year. This is her 71st year as an Ursuline Sister. “I just felt the call,” she said. “I liked what the Ursuline Sisters were doing and I wanted to be a part of it.”

She was born Helen Marie McCarty, the third oldest of eight children, but the community already had a Sister Helen Marie. Her grandmother recommended mixing her father’s name, Paul, and her mother’s, Nettie Rose, to make Pauletta. Because the Mount had always been home to her, in the ensuing years, she took it upon herself to make new novices feel welcome. “I wanted them to love it as I did,” she said.

Sister Pauletta was a teacher for 36 years, serving in seven Kentucky cities, the St. Louis suburbs and in Nebraska. She loved teaching sixth grade the best.

“They were neither babies nor grownups,” she said. “They understood what you were talking about.” The longest place she ministered was Blessed Mother School in Owensboro, Ky., where she taught under her favorite principal, the late Sister Mary Damien Abell. “She recognized you. She was so very helpful,” Sister Pauletta said.

Sister George Mary Hagan lived with Sister Pauletta and taught with her those seven years at Blessed Mother.

“Sister Pauletta is a loving, caring, kind and especially prayerful person,” Sister George Mary said. “She always has a ready smile for all. A wonderful teacher, she loved all of her students, retaining friendships throughout the years and still encouraging them on life’s journey. I consider her a dear friend who has also mentored me much in life.”

Sister Pauletta’s most memorable year was when she taught at St. Bartholomew in the Louisville suburb of Buechel. She had 60 students, and taught in a temporary classroom. “I had 30 boys and 30 girls,” she said. “I had to have a swivel chair, I couldn’t get between the aisles.”



From left, Heather McCarty, Family Resource Center coordinator at West Louisville Elementary School; Father Mark Buckner, pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Church; Sister Pauletta; Debi Hopkins, pastoral associate at St. Mary Magdalene; Ursuline Sister Mary Sheila Higdon; and Brother Kenny Stone, pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church pose for a picture at the school. They represent the main groups that have contributed financially and/or manually to the Weekend Feeding Project that seeks to send nutritious food home on the weekend for qualified students at the school.

One of her students she's most proud of is Sister Ann McGrew, who she taught in the eighth grade at St. Paul School in Leitchfield, Ky. "It made me feel pretty good that one of my students joined the convent," Sister Pauletta said.

"Sister Pauletta was very interested in the individual student," said Sister Ann, who is now director of the Mount Saint Joseph Conference and Retreat Center. "She went out of her way to make sure we understood the subject matter. She taught the student more than the subject."

One of Sister Ann's fondest memories reflects Sister Pauletta's kindness. "When I finished the eighth grade, we had a ceremony on Sunday," Sister Ann said. "My father died on Tuesday. Sister Pauletta wrote me a card expressing her sympathy and assuring me of her prayers. That meant so much to my family. She was such a caring person."

Sister Pauletta left teaching in 1976 to become assistant local superior and director of transportation at the Motherhouse. "I made doctor appointments for the sisters, and I took them on their shopping trips," she said. Being transportation director was a little simpler than it is now. "We only had five cars," she said.

In 1981, she began in parish ministry, first at Precious Blood Parish in Owensboro. She visited shut-ins and people in nursing homes, taking them Communion. "I liked that very much," she said. In 1986 she spent the next three years at the parish center in Greenville, Ky., with the late Sister Jean Claire Ballard. "We did everything but preach," Sister Pauletta said.

Sister George Mary said those years were enriching for Sister Pauletta. "She has a great charism for the sick, comforting them and praying with them."

Sister Pauletta tutored high school students in Hardinsburg, Ky., from 1989-92, but decided it was time to end her teaching career. From 1992-98, she served as the sacristan at the Motherhouse.

"I feel very much at home in the sacristy," she said. "I had to light candles recently and some of the sisters said, 'It sure does look natural to see you in the sacristy.'"

Sister Pauletta retired in 1998, but from 2005-2010, she was the daily annalist for the community, writing down the significant events of the day for the archives, something that has



Sister Pauletta, center, is joined by Sister Marie Goretta Browning, left, and Sister Naomi Aull in helping to stuff letters for the 2011 Easter mailing. The mailing urges friends of the Ursuline Sisters to send their prayer requests.

been done for more than 100 years at the Mount. “That was kind of fun,” she said. “I got to be nosy without feeling guilty.”

In her spare time, she enjoys doing word search games. Recently she has been volunteering at nearby West Louisville Elementary School, bagging healthy snacks for some students to take home on the weekend so they will have a nutritious meal.

Sister Pauletta said she feels blessed to be an Ursuline Sister. “It was the best thing for me,” she said. “I feel grateful to the Lord. You knit me together in my mother’s womb, you know all my faults and failures, yet you still love me.”

By Dan Heckel