

Sister Paula Kelleher SSJ Eulogy
Friday, July 17, 2026
Christ The King Parish, Worcester, MA
By Nick Argento, nephew of Sister Paula

Good morning. Thank you for attending this celebration of my aunt Paula's life. Thank you to Sister Betsy Sullivan, President of the Sisters of Joseph- Springfield and Sister Patricia McDonell, Executive Vice President from the Sisters of St. Joseph as well all of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Also we want to thank the myriad of sisters and priests who prayed for and visited Paula. Thank you to the many priests here today concelebrating, and a deep word of thanks to Monsignor Tom Sullivan here at Chris the King for celebrating mass, preaching, and for your pastoral care of Paula during her illness. Thank you to Sister Cathy Livingstone for proclaiming the Word this morning.

Our family is grateful to the medical staff at St. Vincent's Hospital and the remarkable staff at the Jewish Healthcare Center both here in Worcester for their attentive, responsive care. Thank you to the Reardon, Roderique/Reedy, and Argento families for your love and support. To my aunt Kathleen, your sibling companionship, and looking after Paula was rooted in love. Although one might chalk it up to an older sibling's responsibility, Kathleen: you are a model of how to love and care for a family member and friend.

Sister Paula Kelleher loved God, she loved her family in the Sisters of Saint Joseph, she loved her family from Hartshorn Avenue here in Worcester, she loved her brother in-law Nick Argento, and she loved those whom she provided ministry. She would be quick to tell you that her faith found its roots from her parents Bill and Catherine Kelleher as well as her grandfather Papa O'Connor.

As a sister, her life was immersed in two significant ways: in consecrated life and in being a loving sibling. As a sister in consecrated life, she worked actively to knit together neighbors and God with love. And she was a devoted sister to Kathleen and Barbara as well as actively remembering her brother Private First Class John David Kelleher. Paula originally proclaimed vows as Sister John David, to honor her brother Jackie who died in service to this country during the Korean conflict. Paula's stories about Uncle Jackie were commonly vivid and animated. Although my siblings and I never met Uncle Jackie, we felt that we knew him.

A vowed life/ a life of dedication /a sanctified holy life/ a spiritual calling to vocation: Paula Kelleher was not a cloistered sister. Rather she found the presence of God in prayer and community, bringing that holy presence forth to others in her vibrant, active, apostolic life. Paula held so many positions and served on so many committees in schools, parishes, and for two dioceses that there are too many for me to recite here. However, whether it was working at St. Mary's in Longmeadow or Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in Spencer, directing the annual diocesan Retirement Fund for the Religious or as Vicar for Religious in the Worcester diocese, Paula's animated energy,

common sense, great sense of humor, wit, and creativity was welcomed by those whom she met.

Paula had two nieces, me—her nephew— and her nephew in-law Walt Perkins. Paula Argento—named in honor of Paula Kelleher and Maria Argento Perkins.

My two siblings and I witnessed many iterations of Paula as a Sister of St. Joseph, ranging in the 1960's when my aunt Paula brought 25 sisters from Sacred Heart Elementary School, Gardner, MA for a picnic pool party at our house in West Boylston – our basement was so adorned with black and white habits, it looked like we were having a sale on them. It was from that iteration in a habit to an audience with other sisters meeting St. John Paul II in Rome to Paula ministering to all living in consecrated life when appointed by Worcester Bishop Timothy Harrington as Vicar for Religious. Her appointment was extended by Bishops Daniel Reilly and Robert McManus.

While at St. Mary's in Longmeadow, kids from the Willie Ross School for the Deaf shared learning space in the building. So Paula learned how to sign and taught her 2nd graders at St. Mary's how to sign.

My mother had two sisters; thus we had Auntie Kathleen and not Auntie Paula, we had Auntie Sister. Commonly at the holidays a gift from Auntie Sister would be a puzzle book or a tactile puzzle. One Christmas when I was about ten years old, she gave me a book that showed how to use sign language.

Paula then proceeded to teach me how to sign 'I love you dearly.' Not, 'I love you.' It was 'I love you dearly.' That was her most common close whenever I ended a phone conversation or hugged Auntie Sister goodbye.

She taught me how to sign: I love you dearly. Please do it with me. (*Show 3 fingers: thumb, index finger, and pinky finger in unison. Then show open both fists away from you, leading to your arms crossed. Invite the congregation to extend this to each other.*)

Like all of the Kelleher sisters, Paula was smart, curious, and loved to learn. She had multiple master's degrees and she was most proud of her clinical pastoral education that led to her becoming a hospital chaplain. She became fluent in Spanish, finding her knowledge of the additional language connected her more deeply to Spanish speaking people, especially at moments when they sought the compassionate care of a chaplain.

Paula loved to tell and teach stories about women from the Bible. And I learned a lot about them from her. She described the story of Abigail as a woman of great strength, whose peace offering to David prevented destruction in the Book of Samuel. Miriam, Moses' sister, who led worship with a timbrel in hand told in Exodus as a woman of faith. And in the Acts of the Apostles, there was Priscilla, who hosted early church meetings, met St. Paul—traveled with him and her husband to Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. She was an early woman of the Church devoted to Christ.

So it is no surprise that one of Paula's favorite biblical quotations came from the Book of Ruth. Among many qualities, Ruth was a woman who expressed loyalty to others and devotion to God.

The quotation is this:

"Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

And it is here that I leave you with the legacy of Sister Paula Kelleher: a loving sibling and sister-in-law, a loyal friend, a caring aunt, and a dedicated Sister of St. Joseph who was self-described as "happy in my calling." She cherished the opportunity given by God to manifest the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Paula's ministry was stitched together by serving the marginalized, making life better for those in need, listening and supporting those in consecrated life, and embracing the radical inclusivity of a Sister of Saint Joseph.

Aren't we better for having had Paula in our lives?

Auntie Sister, I love you. Paula, we love you.

No. Wait. I said that incorrectly!

Auntie Sister, I love you dearly. Paula, we love you dearly.