Sister Mary Patricia (Margaret Raymond) Dewey, OP
(1938 – 2014)

In the closing paragraph of her autobiography, Sister Mary Pat spoke of the many rewarding experiences that filled her life, and of her work with “people from different cultures, ages, and backgrounds.” She wrote of God’s blessings, and of her journey’s fruitfulness. Her life story is most interesting.

On August 17, 1938, Raymond Dewey and his wife, the former Margaret Kennedy, both of Chicago, rejoiced in the birth of a daughter. They christened her Mary Patricia. She was their second child, following James Raymond, who was four years old at the time of her birth. In 1942 another child joined the family, Robert Aaron.

The children received an English/Irish heritage, English from their father and Irish from their mother. In her autobiography Sister Mary Pat wrote of their family life, which she described as “ordinary working class and traditional.” The boys spent time with their father in the workshop and garage, while she helped her mother in the kitchen and laundry. “I learned to pray at my mother’s knee in the dining room.”

She experienced death and sorrow at an early age. Her paternal grandmother lived with the Deweys, and Mary Pat saw her great-grandmother every week. When Mary Pat was ten one of them died, and the other died the next year. In 1952 her mother died of a stroke, bringing much heartbreak to the family; and with some help from her father and her aunts, Mary Pat took over care of the house.

She began her education at Hookway Public School and attended for four years, but then transferred to St. Leo School with the Sisters of Providence. In seventh grade she started going to daily Mass, and began thinking of a future in religious life. Her secondary years were spent at Aquinas High School, and there she met the Adrian Dominican Sisters, who attracted her more than did the Sisters of Providence.

In 1954 her father married again. His new wife was Genevieve Newman Costa, who became a mother and friend to his three children. “I was greatly blessed to have two mothers.” This second marriage brought two more members into the family: Sal and Mary Ann Costa.

With the presence of her stepmother in the home, Mary Pat was able to become more involved in her high school life. She took part in the many Sodality projects, worked on the school newspaper and yearbook, and was on the stage crew. In addition, she worked hard on her schoolwork, especially math and science. She also worked evenings at a Walgreen Drug Store, and began to prepare to enter the Adrian Dominicans.

On June 26, 1956, at the age of eighteen, Mary Pat entered the postulate in Adrian from St. Leo Parish in Chicago. With her group she received the habit and her religious name (Sister Margaret Raymond) on December 27. As a novice and on several succeeding summers she was
assigned to help in the finance office with the Congregational treasurer, from whom she learned much. Her first vows were pronounced on December 28, 1957.

For sixteen years her appointments kept her in Michigan. Her first assignment sent her to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where she taught second grade at St. Thomas School in Escanaba for two years. In 1960 she was transferred to Queen of the Miraculous Medal in Jackson, where she spent four years, at first with primary children, then with junior high students. Two years later she was in Tecumseh teaching at St. Elizabeth School for two years, and serving as assistant principal the last year.

As a result of summer study at Siena Heights College (now University) in Adrian, Sister Mary Pat received a bachelor’s degree in summer 1966, with a major in math and minors in biology and chemistry.

Her assignment for that year sent her to Adrian Catholic Central High School as a teacher of math and biology for three years. In 1969 she was in Lansing, where she taught biology at Msgr. Gabriels High School in Lansing for a year, then at Lansing Catholic Central High School for four years.

As a result of summer study at Michigan State University in Lansing, in 1971 Sister Mary Pat was awarded a master’s degree in biology. These were the years of renewal, religious life was changing, and she went through a period of doubt, questioning, and searching. In her quest she discovered God/Jesus as a friend and companion. Her “dark night” had been transformed into a deeper knowledge of God. She began to write poetry, assisted with student retreats, and brought religious themes into her teaching.

From 1974 to 1976 she spent two years as a graduate student at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, resulting in a second master’s degree in 1977, this time in moral theology. Summer study resulted in certificates: one in advanced religious education from the Diocese of Lansing in 1974, and one in medical ethics from the Texas Medical Center in Houston in 1976.

Because of her study her ministry changed. From 1976 to 1979, Sister Mary Pat served as chaplain at the University of Michigan/St. Mary Student Chapel. In 1979 she became an advocate for social justice at a justice and peace center, Groundwork, three years in its Lansing center and three years in its Detroit center. Her passion for justice and peace grew, also her desire to work with the poor. She began to take part in peace demonstrations, was arrested, and was one of the protesters who spent some time in Oakland County Jail.

After three months of study at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas, she worked with the sisters in Managua, Nicaragua, ministering with women who were humble, poor, and suffering. In 1986 she was quoted in a newspaper, The Record, saying that she considered it wrong for the U.S. to aid the Contras. An article that she wrote against the death sentence appeared in the Groundwork publication for November 13, 1988.

In May 1988 she left to work as administrative assistant in the Overseas Chapter Office, and two years later she was elected Chapter Prioress of the Overseas Chapter. For six years she served in
that capacity, traveling to many countries and cultures. When her six-year term ended she took a sabbatical year, which included four months of study in theology at the Center for Continuing Formation at Notre Dame University in Indiana.

In 1997 she moved into a full-time preaching ministry at a House of Preachers opened by the Congregation with centers in Garner and Raleigh, North Carolina. For five years the preaching team led parish missions, gave retreats, and led prayer meetings. Sister Mary Pat became well known as an accomplished preacher. She also led monthly prayer meetings at an assisted living center for low-income seniors.

The House of Preachers closed in 2002 for lack of personnel, and Sister Mary Pat returned to Adrian. In 2003 she supported three Grand Rapids Dominicans by attending their trial for breaking into a missile silo site and causing property damage.

In Adrian, Sisters Mary Pat took the responsibility of serving as administrative assistant in the Holy Rosary Chapter office. About half her duties involved secretarial work, and half working directly with the sisters. After eleven years in this ministry, she retired in 2013 and volunteered her services. These included spending many hours at the Meta Peace Team Center in Lansing, as well as serving on their Board. She also volunteered many hours at the Motherhouse in spiritual direction until her unexpected death on June 6, 2014, at the age of seventy-five.

The wake-remembrance service for Sister Mary Pat was held in St. Catherine Chapel on June 10. Sister Mary Ellen Youngblood, Chapter Priorress of Adrian Crossroads Mission Chapter, extended sympathy, and welcomed the great number of Sister Mary Pat’s relatives and friends who had assembled to bid her farewell. She summarized Sister Mary Pat’s life and ministry, and added: “In the early morning hours, in the company of Jim and Lisa, Bob and Sharon, Sister Mary Pat’s community, and me, Sister Mary Pat slowly and peacefully returned to the God who awaited her.”

Sister Sharon Weber, one of the sisters who lived with Sister Mary Pat, spoke at length. She told those assembled that community was very important to Sister Mary Pat, that she cared about her family, her community, and her world. She lived out that care in large ways and small ways.

Sister Teresita Ruiz represented the sisters from the Dominican Republic. She spoke of Sister Mary Pat as a prayerful woman, dedicated to spreading the Gospel, with a love for the poor and vulnerable, and expressed the gratitude of the sisters from outside the U.S. for her love, care, and interest.

A message from Christopher Matthias, Program Coordinator for Justice and Peace, was read. He wrote of Sister Mary Pat as a comfort and inspiration, outspoken in her commitment to peace. “If I live to be half the activist that she was, I will consider my life well accomplished.”

Sister Ann Romayne Fallon represented the Mantellata Mission Group. She described Sister Mary Pat’s willingness to serve the group in various capacities, and to inspire them as a group who not only talked about charity but who indulged in charitable activities.
Sister Patricia Siemen sent a long message that was read. It included stories dating to her days on the General Council. She wrote of traveling to Africa with Sister Mary Pat, visiting the sisters in South Africa, Kenya, Botswana, Johannesburg, and Cape Town. “Sister Mary Pat was one of the most faithful women of the Gospel that I have ever known.”

Sister Nancyann Turner also sent a long message. She wrote of serving as Sister Mary Pat’s Co-provincial and later as her Chapter Priorress, of journeying together to the Dominican Republic, of enjoying membership in many peace organizations with her, and “our Dominican sisterhood.”

Short messages were received from: Sister Joan Mumaw, IHM, who went to school with Bob Dewey, and who knew Sister Mary Pat from her work in Groundwork and when she was Chapter Priorress for the overseas sisters; and from Father Joseph Mulligan, SJ, who wrote from Naragua of Sister Mary Pat’s passion for justice.

Sister’s older brother James told stories about their school life. One was: they usually took the street car to and from school together. One nice day he put her on the street car, and enjoyed a walk to school. When he arrived, he found that she was in the school office. She had been bitten by a dog and he had to take her home.

Sister’s niece, Lisa, James’s daughter, spoke of her aunt, whom she called Aunt Sister. She had to explain that to her friends. She never got to know Sister very well, since Sister traveled around the country and the world so much. Her desire to know more about Sister was fulfilled tonight. “I learned so much, and that I will take with me.”

Sister’s stepbrother, Sal Costa, was present. He spoke of Sister as a friend. Although he spent thirty years in the Navy and was against everything that she stood for, she always seemed to support him in his Navy career. Her arrests had some results for him. Because of his relationship to her, he would be called in and questioned. There were, however, no serious repercussions.

Sister Jean Hughes told a humorous story. They were on their way to San Francisco with a group intending to picket a military installation, and she kept asking Sister Mary Pat if she was ready to be arrested. Obviously, the answer was “Yes.” Sister’s brother Bob Dewey also spoke. He told of her care of the family after her mother died, and of the stepmother who freed her from those duties.

The funeral ceremony held for Sister Mary Pat took place on June 11. Father Peter Dougherty, a member of the Meta Peace Team and a good friend, was the presider and Sister Elizabeth Walters, IHM, preached on the readings and included some stories. Two were:

For many years our peace community partnered with communities across the state to end the production and deployment of nuclear warfare. ... We heard a presentation, “If there is a SAC (Strategic Air Command) Base in your neighborhood shut it down because it is a clear and present danger.” Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, planes fitted with nuclear weapons were departing Michigan SAC bases and flying over our children, our neighborhoods, churches, and work places. ... As a result of many years of work, lots of imprisonment, and much
suffering, we did NOT succeed in disarming nuclear weapons, but we did succeed in removing nuclear weapons from Michigan.

Another story concerned a group (including Sister Mary Pat) that paraded around Wurtsmith Strategic Air Command in Oscoda. The group was escorted off the base and given citations to appear in court. Sister Mary Pat was detained, because she did not have her driver’s license with her. The base people were unsure as to who she was, and arrested her. She called Sister Liz to identify her by her legal name. Since the groups never gave personal information about their members, Sister Liz first identified her as “Woman of peace, peacemaker, great preacher,” etc. When these titles were not accepted, she gave Sister Mary Pat’s name as “Margaret Dewey,” which was part of her religious name, and was not accepted. Eventually she understood what was happening, and gave her legal name, “Mary Pat Dewey.” Then Sister Mary Pat was released with a citation.

After the beautiful ceremony, Sister Mary Pat was laid to rest in the Congregational cemetery.