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## In Memory of Sister Pat Haley

Kimberly Flint-Hamilton  
*St. Lawrence University*

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## **Remembering Sister Patricia Haley, SCN**

**Kimberly Flint-Hamilton, PhD**  
**St. Lawrence University**

**Cecilia Moore, PhD**  
**University of Dayton**

**Steven Hamilton**  
**Hamilton Publishing LLC**



Beloved by the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, and her religious community, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Sr. Patricia Haley, SCN, passed away on Tuesday November 27, 2018, in Nazareth, Kentucky, at the age of 73. Known to her community as “Sr. Pat”, she was interviewed in Bardstown, Kentucky by Cecilia Moore, Kimberly Flint-Hamilton, and Steven Hamilton for the BCTS Oral History Project on October 4, 2013.

Sr. Pat felt that the Oral History Project was so important that, even though she had taken ill and was hospitalized on the day we’d arranged for the interview, she did not want to reschedule our time

together, but instead asked us to visit with her in her hospital room. It was there that Sr. Pat shared the highlights of her life story, which we recount here. We spent several hours reminiscing and laughing with Sr. Pat as she shared her memories.

Sr. Pat was born in on August 22, 1945 in Columbus, Georgia. Her parents were Blanche Miles Haley and Julius Haley. Blanche Miles Haley was born in Phenix City, Alabama, which is just across the river from Columbus. Julius Haley was from Louisiana. He was 19 years older than Blanche. Sr. Pat remembers fondly how her parents used to tease one another. Sr. Pat was one of five children. She had three sisters, Joyce, Sheila, Debra, and one brother, Julius Jr.

### **My great-grandmother was my heart**

Sr. Pat spoke with great love about her great-grandmother, Mary Boykins, who passed away when Sr. Pat was in the tenth grade. When she was in kindergarten in Columbus, Georgia, she used to visit with her great-grandmother. Sr. Pat recalls the joy of being with her:

My great-grandmother was my heart. ... When I was in kindergarten we used to have to go to great-grandmother's house after we were let out, because kindergarten was only a half day. I did love just being around her. We would sing a lot while she was cooking and all, and she would say, "Come here child, I want to teach you something." And I would sit down and she would start humming a song and she would say, "Now hum it." Then she would say, "Now, sing it." And I would do my little chipping right along, you know. Yeah. It was just dear to be around her. I remember a lot of things she would say to my uncles and whatever ones when they would come in asking her when is she going to have lunch ready. She would be sitting in a rocking chair as usual, and she'd say, "Did you eat this morning?" And they'd say, "Well, yes ma'am." She said, "Did you feed the hogs?" They'd say, "Yes, ma'am." "Did you feed the chickens?" "Yes, ma'am." "Are you going to feed them again?" "Well, no ma'am." Then she'd say, "Well, why do you think I'm going to fix you something else?" She was just a dear. Just a dear.

Sr. Pat's father, Julius Haley, worked as a chef at the Morrison's Cafeteria chain. When Sr. Pat was a young child, he was transferred to Birmingham, Alabama and the family moved with him there from

Columbus. In elementary school she was taught by the Sisters of Saint Francis and Benedictine Sisters. In high school she was taught by the Sisters of Charity.

### **She disappeared in the house for a week**

Sr. Pat described her mother as a stern disciplinarian. She related one incident when her mother grew tired of the children's misbehavior and found a new, creative way to get their attention. She disappeared in the house.

She got all of her clothes and my Dad's clothes together and put them out of their room. So she had the room all to herself. And then she would cook for herself, just for one person. Then she would eat and go take her bath. She didn't say one word to us and we knew better than to say anything to her! So that went on for one week. When she finally decided to reappear, and we knew dearer after that!

We asked Sr. Pat to speak about the role of religion in her upbringing. Her grandmother and great-grandmother were both very religious. Her grandmother was Methodist, and her great-grandmother was Baptist. She would spend about two weeks with them every summer, and would attend Sunday services with them – one Sunday she went with her grandmother, the next with her great-grandmother. They used to send her to Sunday School with a quarter to contribute. Sr. Pat confessed that sometimes she ended up only giving 15 cents ...

Well, sometimes all of the quarter didn't get there, because we used to stop at the filling station. They had a sweet shop and we would buy something from the sweet shop. ... I didn't know that she was sending notes on to the Sunday School teacher saying how much she'd given us, so we got caught!

### **"Baptize the child"**

In her heart, though, Sr. Pat longed to become a Catholic like her father, who was a cradle Catholic. Sr. Pat described her attempts to convert to Catholicism between second and eighth grades – asking so many questions in her catechism classes that the priest would say that she wasn't ready for conversion. The priest finally gave in and consented to letting Sr. Pat be baptized when she was in the eighth grade,

commenting, "Baptize the child 'cause she isn't going to get any better."<sup>1</sup>

Sr. Pat's maternal grandmother and great-grandmother were politically active. During the Civil Rights Movement, they worked to get people registered to vote. Sr. Pat spent time with them, and their passion for justice planted a seed in Sr. Pat. She spoke with pride about her own participation in the Civil Rights Movement, as she began joining protests while in high school. She described her encounters with dogs and fire hoses. Her parents, while not enthusiastic about the dangers she was facing, did not forbid her from taking part in what she felt passionate about.

**"You already have three sisters – why do you need more?"**

By the time she was in the eleventh grade, Sr. Pat knew she wanted to become a nun. She remembered the way her parents reacted when she told them of her vocation.

For a while my Dad didn't say anything, but my mother said she was pleased that I was going to do that. Finally, my Dad said, "You already have three sisters, why do you need more?" I said, "Are you serious?" He said, "I know you're gonna do it anyway." And I said, "Well, is it alright?" "Well, I guess it is." So, in the end he was okay with it.

In 1963, at age 18, Sr. Pat finished high school and entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Charity in Nazareth, Kentucky. She was the first African American postulant of the community – a pioneer. There, she studied Education at Nazareth College. She felt the challenges of being the only person of color in the community and spoke with the Mother Superior, Mother Lucille Russell, and the Novice Director, Sister Constance Mueller, about her feelings. One request she made was to read the newspapers to keep up with what was going on in the secular world. This was an unusual thing for a novice to ask, but they allowed it for her. They also arranged for Sr. Pat to spend time with a local black family, the Hawk family. The family would spend visiting days with Sr. Pat and she could confide in them. They helped her feel less lonely and isolated.

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly McDaniels, Nov. 28, 2018, "Sister Patricia Haley: An Interview", Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, <https://scnfamily.org/sister-patricia-haley-an-interview/>, accessed July 12, 2019.

In an interview with Kelly McDaniels<sup>2</sup> for the Sisters of Charity, Sr. Pat told a story about her experiences with segregation while a postulant.

"When we got to Nazareth as postulants we were assigned duties. I was assigned to the white men's dining room. I thought, 'There's no way I'm gonna do that.' Mother Lucille was coming down the hall, and although I knew I wasn't supposed to, I stopped her. I asked for a meeting with her and her Council 'because I am assigned a duty I simply will not do.' The next day Sister Constance said that the meeting would take place that afternoon. I told the Council, 'It is not right to be segregated in a place like this. I just spent my years in high school and earlier fighting segregation. I know I was coming into a white world, but there is no excuse for this.' Sister Mary Ransom Burke, bless her heart said, 'What would you suggest we do?' I looked at her and said, 'It's just a partition between two dining rooms. If you have a ladder and screwdriver, I'll take it down....Mother Lucille said, 'We will have to have a conversation with the workers.' I said 'You didn't have a conversation with them before. It was decided by the Council. I will not work in a segregated dining room, obedience or no obedience.'

Nothing else was said but in a week the partition was down and I took the duty. Many of the workers did not like it but it was down. In the hallway there was a white water fountain and a colored fountain. I said you also need to do something about those two fountains. So they did. Sister Mary Ransom later said 'Thank you' to me and so did Mother Lucille."

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<sup>2</sup> Kelly McDaniels, 2018.



Sister Ann Barbara (Patricia) Haley, SCN<sup>3</sup>

**“Come see, we have a teacher who looks like me!”**

When Sr. Pat graduated, she was assigned to teach at St. Ladislas School in Columbus, Ohio. There were just a few black children in the school, and they were surprised to find a black nun teaching there. Sr. Pat tells this story about her first day at the school:

There was a few little black kids in the second grade, and on my first day when the kids were let out from school, the one little boy ran out and then he came back in to the classroom holding his mother’s hand. He said, “Come see, come see, we have a teacher that looks like me, come see!” And the mother couldn’t believe it either, so she came to see. She said to me, “He wanted me to come in, because there is someone who looks like him.”

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<sup>3</sup> Published with permission from Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Archives.

**I mean, it was quite an experience, that's all I can say!**

Sr. Pat was one of the charter members of the National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC). It was her Mother Superior who informed Sr. Pat of the gathering of black sisters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1968. She had obtained a flier and showed it to Sr. Pat, asking if she was interested in attending. Sr. Pat was definitely interested. The trip to Pittsburgh was her first trip on an airplane. When she arrived at the Pittsburgh airport, she recalls feeling the same way that little boy in the second grade must've felt – seeing nearly 100 black nuns together was “unbelievable.” She remembers seeing the black porters stumbling over each other to assist the nuns. In her words, “I mean, it was quite an experience that's all I can say, quite an experience!”

At the gathering, the nuns discussed why they had decided to make vocations, the challenges they faced in their orders, and the additional challenges of an increasing number of women leaving their congregations.

We also talked about what we could do to support the lay community. Because we felt that Black Catholics weren't speaking up and we needed to help them find a voice in speaking and that was amazing. What we really ended up doing was being a voice helping Black Catholic Community and speaking out to the church and it wasn't easy – it wasn't easy at all.

One of the biggest successes of the NBSC was encouraging sisters to return to school to earn advanced degrees. Many also ended up taking on roles of responsibility in their community, such as Mother Superiors, which they never imagined could happen before the gathering.

We asked Sr. Pat to reflect on her time with the Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS). She reflected that she had been working to support the Institute for 29 years. Her primary role involved working with the formation program for nuns and seminarians. She also helped with liturgy and prayer services. At first, the liturgy programs were designed to serve black seminarians, but the IBCS began getting requests for non-black seminarians to participate.

First of all it was just black seminarians, but after a while some of the directors asked if they could have some of their



[white seminarians] come through and we told them, "yes, but it couldn't just be for one summer." So, they signed contracts and their seminarians would come for three summers. And then as the summers went on we constructed the programs different ways. So, first the black seminarians, they came and they were in a program by themselves, and then we looked at all of the problematic parts of it and [tried to improve] on them. And they seemed to like it, but some of them weren't as happy as the summers went on - there were different ones with different attitudes. We said, "If you are going to be in in this program, this is what you have to do." And some of them complained with their directors. But it went on anyway and some seminarians are still coming out and singing.

### **We didn't care. We didn't ask them!**

One of Sr. Pat's contributions to the IBCS was her work with community life. Through this, she began designing "Revival Nights." One special aspect of revival nights was the Women's Revival.

A lot of priests didn't let the women preach, so we said, "That's alright, we will preach ourselves, so we will have Women's Revival Nights" and so we had those on Wednesday nights and it went well. And we had the different preachers from the Institute, Sister Eva Regina Martin and a couple of lay ministers who were preachers. It went quite well. And we went to different parishes each Wednesday. It went so well that the groups would follow the women preachers.

When we asked what the priests thought about Women's Revival Nights, Sr. Pat responded, "We didn't care. We didn't ask them!"

### **Well, she's a night lady!**

Sr. Pat contributed many gifts to the IBCS. She organized Ancestor Celebrations during which she told the story of the founding of the IBCS. Because of her, it became a tradition for students and teachers alike to share in the telling of the story of the history of the Institute. Sr. Pat developed a reputation as being the person who made others feel most welcome. She understood that black Catholics are not a monolithic entity, that there are many different ways to be black, that we have

different experiences of being black and of being Catholic. She became an ambassador for the Institute, helping people understand the work that was expected of them but also making them feel that all the students were part of a larger journey - for themselves, for the Institute, and for the Church.

Sr. Pat recalled that the programming at IBCS could be intense, and the students needed something to lighten their load. She and the other faculty came up with "Friday Culture Nights," a few hours where they could "share around their talents and just be foolish". It wasn't an official part of the program, but it became an important way for participants, faculty and students alike, to relax together and share a few laughs.

One act that became a Culture Night favorite was a persona that Sr. Pat developed based on a song she had heard on the radio. While she didn't remember the title of the song, she remembered the topic - a lady called Red Hot Henrietta Brown. Sr. Pat could always be counted on to do a cabaret performance featuring Red Hot Henrietta Brown during Culture Nights. When asked who Red Hot Henrietta Brown was, she responded, "Well, she's a night lady!" She would don a costume and act out some priceless anecdotes and witticisms that left the audience in stitches with laughter!

Sr. Pat celebrated her Golden Jubilee - the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her profession - in 2016. In 2017, she recorded Gospel songs and spirituals that have been produced as a CD by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth.<sup>4</sup> Despite her many health challenges, Sr. Pat was determined to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gathering of the NBSC and the Gathering of Black Catholic Women in New Orleans in the summer of 2018. Many close to Sr. Pat worried about her making this journey. They were concerned about the heat, the flight, and the distance she would be from her medical team at home in Kentucky. But, Sr. Pat was not worried. She was convinced of the power of Black Catholic women to be a force for positive transformation in the Church and in the community. Sr. Pat believed that Black Catholic women, religious and lay, needed intentional time to work, pray, preach, and play together. That time spent together gave them the strength, wisdom, and courage to

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<sup>4</sup> "Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Release 'Old Gospels and Spirituals' CD," September 7, 2017 (<https://therecordnewspaper.org/sisters-charity-nazareth-release-old-gospel-spirituals-cd/>), accessed July 15, 2019.

exercise their power as individuals and as collectives. Despite fear, pain, and discomfort, she knew where she needed and wanted to be. So, she went. Being there was one of her last great acts of love and faith.

We remember Sr. Pat's kindness, her determination, and her lifelong commitment to justice and equality. She was a true pioneer, a valued role model, and a precious soul.



Caption for photo<sup>5</sup>

*Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord,  
and let Your perpetual light shine upon her.*

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<sup>5</sup> When this photograph was taken, Sr. Pat was doing the very thing she wanted to do the most and the very thing that so many people were afraid for her to do. She was determined to attend the 50 anniversary of the National Black Sisters' Conference in New Orleans in late July 2018. Before the NBSC anniversary the NBSC was hosting a Gathering of Black Catholic Women. Sr. Pat was a big believer in the importance of Black Catholic women, religious and lay, working, praying and playing together and she helped to bring into being the tradition of the Gathering of Black Catholic Women that coincided with the meetings of the NBSC. It was a very challenging experience for Sr. Pat to be there. The photograph reflects that, but it also reflects her absolute commitment to the spiritual development and flourishing of Black Catholic women. Sr. Pat's dream and determination, we believe, are captured in this photograph.

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