

Reflections on the Occasion of Father Paul Street Naming at St. Mary's

Father Paul was an easy, entertaining public speaker. A talent I didn't inherit. When I asked him for his secret, he said you had to have something to say, and it helps if you have notes. Today, I have something to say, and, as you see, I've brought my notes. They're my attempt to express thoughts and feelings I've carried with me since growing up in this parish. For the sake of brevity, I've distilled them into a quick overview as I look back on the importance of St Mary's to our family.

This street now bears Father Paul's name, an honor he shares with his wife of 70 years and this parish. Fifty years at St Mary's was a union of a happily married man with a total dedication to this church, the place where he fulfilled his calling, caring for and supporting the parishioners he loved. Blessed with a first-class temperament, he knew how to bring peace of mind when rules failed to answer the questions that life puts to us.

Father Paul was a man of many facets, and he touched the lives of others in more ways than I could mention today. My husband liked that he was "learned" and scholarly, yet he also knew how to share a joke and tell one. Father Paul exuded a sense of joy and contentment. His homecare companion, Cindy who's with us today read to him from his daily prayer book as he took his last breath. When we thanked her for all the care she'd given, she simply said that her two years with Father Paul were the most peaceful of her life, and that she should be thanking us. Those are just a few glimpses into the man Father Paul was, out of so many that come to mind.

For us, life at home was to be in the presence of two energetic, intelligent, and extremely amusing parents who lived their lives together to the fullest. Home was safe and all-embracing and life-enhancing. This private world was interwoven with the warm and welcoming communal life of St. Mary's, forming a bond that's all too often absent in a world that seems made up of nothing but bits and pieces. A bond, I might add, nourished by the best home cooks in the world!

Ours was a small family and we were fortunate that you welcomed us into a much larger one. So, please do not forget or underestimate that your 50 years with Father Paul were also our indelible 50 years as part of this wonderful community. And for that, I say thank you!

The fact that St. Mary's envisioned and, now, today announces this street naming tells us something about Father Paul – that he was an unusual person, yes, but it illustrates even more the life journey that he shared with you and your families. I also want to add a personal note that this event might in some small way bring attention to the quiet, often unseen, work of the good parish priest – a calling and task that requires more of those who undertake it than I could describe here.

Suffice it to say that today's event has been made possible through the attention and commitment that Father Michael and Laila give to the parish day in and day out, just as Father Paul and Shirley did, and so many dedicated others have and continue to do.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who brought about today's street naming for St. Mary's. This honor and recognition of Father Paul, as I have tried my best to say, also belongs to all of you, your parents, grandparents and those who came before you – the success of the Eastern Orthodox American Arab experience is a compelling story yet to be told. May you continue to carry on in the spirit of the generous community you have always been, and may the enthusiasm and light-heartedness of the man we celebrate today help us always remain "Never Better"!

Dorothy Schneirla Downie, October 24, 2021