

# An Icon HERSELF



In the early 1940's on St. Benedict's Feast Day, the ladies of St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kan., were granted the opportunity to join the men of St. Benedict's College at their campus church, both colleges now merged to form Benedictine College, for the celebration of Vespers.

At the age of 18, sitting behind a pillar in St. Benedict's Church on St. Benedict's campus, something began to stir deep within the soul of Paula Howard. She doesn't recall exactly what—perhaps it was the rhythm of the Vespers, the solitude of the monks, or the knowledge that what she was experiencing at that moment had been celebrated in the same way since around the year 500 B.C., but she knew at that exact moment, that she wanted to be part of the permanence of God. As she described it, "I caught the Spirit."

Sister Paula joined the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica in 1943, and just recently celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, 75 years in religious life. Since taking her vows, Sr. Paula has lived throughout the world, working as a teacher, administrator, author and iconographer. While these vocations and ministries were varied and numerous, few were self-chosen. Instead, they were a function of the time, and of the Church, taking her where she was needed, including to Donnelly College.

After returning from teaching for several years in Bethlehem, Sr. Paula learned that Donnelly College needed a Dean of the College. Having been part of the Mount community since 1943, she remembers Donnelly's founding in 1949.

"The reason the College was established was because there were a lot of immigrants who did not have a chance for a good education, so [the founders] wanted to provide an opportunity for a higher education for those that would not otherwise have had a chance, both because of immigrant status, and because of financial reasons," she said. "It was inexpensive. It was, and still is, a place to overcome prejudices."

After Sr. Paula had already retired twice, the opportunity to serve as Interim Dean of the College at Donnelly presented itself.

She agreed to serve until the position was filled. Her "temporary" role lasted nearly 10 years, due to her love for the students and excellent working relationship with the faculty and staff.

Throughout her time at Donnelly, Sr. Paula had numerous administrative responsibilities and maintained teaching at least one class per term to stay in touch with the students and to hear their struggles. She left Donnelly in 1999, but not before making a permanent impact on the students and culture of the College. Sr. Pauls led the effort for Donnelly to become part of the national honor society Phi Theta Kappa, a society still active on campus today.

Recent graduate Ada Sanabria said her choice of Donnelly was due in part to the existence of an honor society, as it provided her a reason to excel, a goal to achieve, and an honor that would open doors to transfer and scholarship opportunities.

Retiring for the third time in 1999, Sr. Paula finally had the time to pursue her desire to paint. Having never painted before, Sr. Paula began experimenting with landscapes and still-life before enrolling in a workshop about painting icons. A new love was born.

While Sr. Paula sees her icons as bringing some of the greatest joy to her life, she also remembers her time at Donnelly quite fondly. And, she is remembered fondly as well. Former Donnelly College President John Murry who served from 1987 to 1998 remembers his friend this way, "At Donnelly she was a lady of all seasons and she could do anything. She is such a multi-talented, bright woman, and Donnelly was lucky to have her."

To this day, in the Admissions office, Sr. Paula's hand-painted portrait of Donnelly founder Sister Jerome Keeler in the icon style hangs prominently for all guests and students to see. While Sr. Paula is no longer on campus herself, her spirit and legacy remain.



Portrait of Sr. Jerome Keeler by Sr. Paula Howard in Icon tradition

### What is an icon?

An icon is a work of art, often painted on wood, representing holy figures such as saints, Mary and Jesus in either portrait style or a scene. Icons differ by artist, but are influenced by some consistent traditions.

- Highly symbolic
- Not intended to look exactly like the person, influenced greatly by the artist's interpretation
- Eyes are large representing windows to the soul
- Neck is large representing the path the holy spirit travels from the heart to the mind
- Mouth is small indicating contemplation and thoughtfulness
- Hands are exaggerated
- No single light source
- Uses royal colors of red and purple