

Mary Hamilton

Reaching Out to the Sick and Infirm — Lovingly, Faithfully

A Nurturing Spirit

A spry, young-at-heart Mary Hamilton used two canes instead of a walker into her nineties so that she could “move faster.” Where did she want to keep on going at that age? To church and to visit the sick and infirm.

Throughout her long life, Mary was ever faithful to both. Her loving faith nurtured her spirit; her spirit nurtured others. It was a circle of believing, living, and loving that only deepened over the passing years.

Rooted in St. Paul

Born Mary Chambers, August 12, 1903, in St. Paul, Minnesota, Mary lived there her whole life, in a variety of locations. This, in itself, is rather unusual in our mobile society. However, her going out to the sick, lonely, and infirm, at an age when she might be the one visited by others, also reflected her character and her life story.

Mary went to the Cathedral school, the “Sisters’ school” where she made her [First Communion](#) and

dreamed of being a Sister. She was the oldest child of a family of seven girls. Her father’s sudden death, when she was 13 and the youngest sibling only a year old, thrust her into the role of helping to raise her siblings. Her many responsibilities included chopping wood at night for an old wood stove.

Mary stayed home until she was 18. She later married and had five children, three boys and two girls. Following her second husband’s death in 1974, Mary sold her home, divided the money among her children, and moved into an apartment. The only one left of her generation, Mary had over 60 grandchildren and great-grandchildren at the time of her death.

Reaching Out

Visiting others moved into full swing after World War II when Mary would go to Fort Snelling to see the wounded soldiers. Playing Checkers with them, the prize was always bedroom slippers. Her faithfulness continued as life brought changes: her son serving in the war, working at the telephone company and later at Summit Universal Federation, and being a princess, a lady in waiting, at the [Winter Carnival](#).



A major source of nourishment for her was her faith and her involvement with other parishioners at her church, [St. Peter Claver](#). She walked to church until her nineties. The “worn-a-bit” shop at her church served thousands of people because of her leadership and hard work; this included sending out thousands of hand written thank-you cards every year. Being chair of the fish bowl was another long-time activity.

One commitment was to serve as an election judge for years and years. Mary never missed voting, even as it is harder to get to the polling booth — where many friends remembered her and greeted her with care and with joy. Another favorite activity was fun! In her day, she was the life of the party. She was a Charleston girl for the Golden Years for a long time.

A Special Touch

Each person touched Mary’s heart.

If someone desired something special, she got it if at all possible. Her attention was drawn to those who were alone in nursing homes and care centers. One example was a blind friend — she brought cheer to



Mary’s First Communion, 1913.

her for 20-30 years, until the woman died. Her visiting included her nephew (with five by-passes) who she asked to bury her.

Candy, books, and her hand-made bedroom slippers were among the goodies that Mary brought to others. For Christmas, a favorite time for her, she made hundreds of little stockings and stuffed them with candy canes and other treats.

A typical day of reaching out began with stuffing her bag with treats for those she would visit. Besides hand-made gifts, her surprises included such items as cookies; soda and a straw; magazines; and fruit. Not having a car, she took the bus, which added significantly to her time commitment.

One of Mary's most enjoyable moments was stopping to see a priest in the hospital. She blessed him, a nice reversal of roles that they both recognized, with humor and delight.

Other people were also touched by her love and concern. One such person was a man who, close to his 100th birthday at the time, rode the bus every day to Mass. She decided that she would get him a pair of gloves for his birthday, for his fingers were sticking out of what he was using.

Ever Faithful

As she aged, Mary had sight and hearing problems and her knees deteriorated. Continuing to reach out to others meant ignoring or overcoming the pain of walking, of getting on the bus, of climbing stairs. Her doctor told her that she was too old for surgery. She told him that using a walker is not an option, for it is "too slow." Mary lived with and worked around the pain.

Bringing her winning personality, gifts, and a bright smile, Mary's desire was to be present to those in need as long as she was able. "I just like doing it."



Mary modeling a \$400 hat: "Not bad for a 92 year old!"

she kept going — even with problems hearing and seeing. No longer using canes, Mary had a mobilized scooter to move faster. She enjoyed weekend visits with her family, and she was very aware of and content with her surroundings. While no longer able to visit



Mary visiting and sharing gifts with Dorothy Roberts.

the sick and shut-ins, Mary made sure that she still attended funerals.

August 2008: Mary celebrated her 105th birthday. All those who knew her felt "blessed to celebrate with her." Her motto in living so long was "never be angry with anyone and help somebody needing help."

April 2009: On April 30, Mary died with her daughter-in-law at her side. Her funeral on May 7 was at her beloved church, St. Peter Claver. Her obituary highlighted the numerous awards that she had received in the 1960s and 1970s for her community service work in the Summit-University area and from her church. Mary was "well-loved and highly respected by her family and everyone whose lives she touched during her journey." She truly was an inspiring woman.