



Paul Shook Served Parish As Deacon For 10 Years

By Evelyn Beck

Paul Shook drives to Anderson four times a year to change the flowers on the grave of his wife, Agnes, whom he calls his angel. She died from cancer in 2003, just a few years after the couple moved from Anderson to Spartanburg to be close to their son.

Agnes and Paul Shook are remembered for their many contributions to St. Joseph's in the naming of The Shook Center, which houses the church office. Paul, the parish's first permanent deacon, served for 10 years before illness forced him to retire in 2000. Agnes served the church in many ways, too, including writing its history.

A native of Troy, Ohio, Paul grew up during the Depression, the fourth of five boys. His dad ran an IGA grocery store in the days before refrigeration, so the family ate well on meat and produce no longer fresh enough to sell. "I always told everybody I didn't know lettuce was green and bananas were yellow," said Paul. As a boy, Paul delivered groceries for other stores in a Model T and picked up eggs from farmers in the country. He enlisted in the Air Force right out of high school, serving stateside for the last two years of World War II. After his discharge, he received a bachelor's degree in accounting from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

After their marriage, Paul and Agnes moved to Chicago, where Paul worked for Arthur Andersen, once one of the "Big Five" accounting firms, and Agnes raised their four children pretty much on her own. "I was married to my job first and family second," said Paul. "I was too wrapped up in my job, absolutely." Though he had been raised Presbyte-

rian, Paul was such a regular at the Catholic church he attended with Agnes that his conversion to Catholicism in 1954 stunned their friends. "Everybody thought I was already Catholic," said Paul.



Paul Shook

When Paul's job with Essex International took them to Belton, S.C., Agnes got involved in the civil rights movement. "Being a Northerner, she came down here and couldn't get over the discrimination," said Paul. One tribute to her efforts is a plaque on Mauldin Road in Anderson with the names of those who helped establish the first integrated low-cost housing in South Carolina.

Paul grew more and more involved at St. Joseph's, especially after his retirement in 1995, to the extent that Father Robert Millard, St. Joseph's thirteenth pastor, encouraged Paul to investigate a diaconate program in Lexington. So at age 59, Paul embarked on the six-year process. "The more I attended classes, the more I thirsted for more knowledge about the faith," he said. "Agnes and Father Millard got me involved. Then the interest to find out more about my faith kept me going." He was ordained a Permanent Deacon on June 2, 1990.

Paul's decision to become a deacon wasn't unexpected, said parishioner Ted Bismack, a long-time friend. "It didn't surprise

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Deacon Shook Started A Ministry For Shut-Ins

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my wife Dot or me because he was always a very devout man,” said Ted. “If I ever met two practicing Catholics that were practicing Catholics, Paul and Agnes were them.”

As a deacon assigned to St. Joseph’s, Paul assisted at Mass, witnessed weddings and performed baptisms. He also started what is his proudest accomplishment: a shut-in ministry. “We visited hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and private homes,” he said. “It’s a necessary thing in every parish because priests cannot get around to all those people.”

Parishioner Mary Guay, a friend and admirer of the Shooks, said that “Paul brought a lot to our church. He is a very good, very caring person. Anyone he went to see felt so much better for his being there. I don’t know if it was the prayers or what he said to encourage them.”

Paul’s retirement occurred soon after he and Agnes made a trip to Italy with Monsignor Joseph Roth. “We were at the Abbey of Monte Cassino and I was on my way up the ramp of the church to assist at Mass,” said Paul. “I reached for the railing, and the next thing I knew they were over me. Msgr. Roth was giving me CPR and the ER doctor on the tour with us worked on my mouth. They thought I was gone. I was anointed on that ramp.” Though he recovered after spending five days in a socialized hospital in Cassini, Italy, and then flying home and having heart valve replacement surgery at Emory Hospital in Atlanta, he was no longer strong enough to maintain his responsibilities as a deacon.

Now 85, Paul continues to work with the shut-in ministry at his church in Spartanburg and to encourage those with a calling to investigate the diaconate. And he reflects with gratitude on a blessed life, which includes six grandchildren and two-great-grandchildren. “The older you get, the more you look back at what has occurred in your life,” he said. “We have a prayer service at an assisted living facility here. I give a little homily on the second Tuesday of every month. I have often said that God has been good to me. I would not change anything that has happened in my life.”

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