



Sister Betty Hannagan

Entered eternal life on January 28, 2016

Who is Sister Betty? Is she just a funny lady—a funny Sister of Charity. I first met Betty when I was a senior novice in charge of the Academy dining room and as a Postulant she was assigned to be my assistant. It was then I learned of her sense of humor. She would go about her work, softly singing “Life is just a bowl of cherries, why do I get all the pits”. We had many laughs together to say nothing about broken dishes and trying to stay out of trouble.

In 1945, Betty began her association with the Sisters of Charity when she attended Holy Name School in East Orange. At the time, Sister Mary Clare asked Marge Brennan to make sure they got on and off the bus at the same stop. A friendship was born, not only between them, but their families also.

When they graduated and had to make a decision about high school, Betty decided to go to the Juniorate. When asked why she made that decision, she replied that she knew she didn’t have to pass a test to get accepted. In those days, she did not have much confidence in herself. This confidence developed as the years flew by.

She served many years as an elementary school teacher in our schools in Jersey City, East Orange, Oradell, and Westwood. She was certainly loved by those children and their parents. She often tells the story about one little boy who could not sit still, despite her many corrections. She decided she had enough and had him sit under her desk to keep him confined. Little did she know the imp would get back at her by tying her shoe laces together. After all, what else could he do while in such a small place.

In 1980, she decided on a new venture and began using her spiritual gifts by working with adults in Carmel Retreat house in Mahwah assisting adults in their search for spiritual growth. She spent five years at the Mt. Carmel Spiritual Center in Ontario, Canada. In 1990 she opened a Visitation House of Prayer in Vero Beach, FL where she conducted retreats and provided spiritual direction. This work continued until 1994 when she decided to move on to become the Director of Religious Education of adults on the parish level in Palm Bay, FL and then on to Panama City, FL for the next ten years. This was a very happy time as she worked with two special friends, Sister Jean, a Franciscan sister, Father Pete, the pastor of the people of St. Dominic Catholic Church. It was here that she celebrated her 50th Jubilee and several of her friends in the community celebrated with her. Her very good friend, Father Gregory celebrated that Mass and he reflected on their many years of friendship. Sister Jean arranged to have a memorial Mass in Panama City so that her many friends could attend. With all these labors of love, her spiritual influence was felt by many as she continued to share her love and joyfulness.

I have had many occasions to travel with Betty. Our journeys through Ireland in the footsteps of Mother Xavier was especially important. As we both lived in Florida, she and I decided to meet the rest of the sisters in Ireland. We had enough frequent flyer miles to get to Ireland and back. This necessitated many plane transfers from Florida to Alabama to Washington to Brussels and then on to Ireland. Imagine our surprise when, on the flight in Brussels, we heard our names over the microphone inviting us to deplane. We were on the wrong plane.

Betty was not very good at directions. When her aunt died, Betty and I left Newark to get to the funeral. Not having lived in NJ a long time, I asked her if she knew the way. She emphatically replied yes on more than one occasion. Well, we indeed got there, much later, as we had gotten lost. The pastor was not too happy with us.

The "U" group, our Mission Reflection group was also the recipient of Betty's love and humor. It was a meeting that she hated to miss. She was always suggesting that we should have one of our meetings on a cruise. Needless to say that never came to be. She loved to travel and she and I decided to go to Canada so I could see the Falls. We decided to go by train for the experience of sleeping in a berth and seeing the countryside. The trip was not without incident as Betty missed a step coming out of her berth and landed half on the step and half in the narrow aisle. How embarrassing!

As Betty became an adopted member on the many Kirwan family reunions, the nieces and nephews have been singing her praises, especially, on face book when they heard of her death. She will be the topic of many future reunions of the family.

She loved all the places and people she had come in contact with. As her health started to deteriorate, and she had to slow down, she moved into the Assisted Living at the Villa. As always, she developed many friends there, the sisters, especially Ceil Charles, and the workers who always came first. She couldn't do enough for them and we thank them for their love and concern for Betty.

The Sisters have lost a wonderful member of OUR family and she will be missed by all those whose lives she touched and until we met again, may God hold you in the palm of His hands.

Sister Maureen Joseph Kirwan