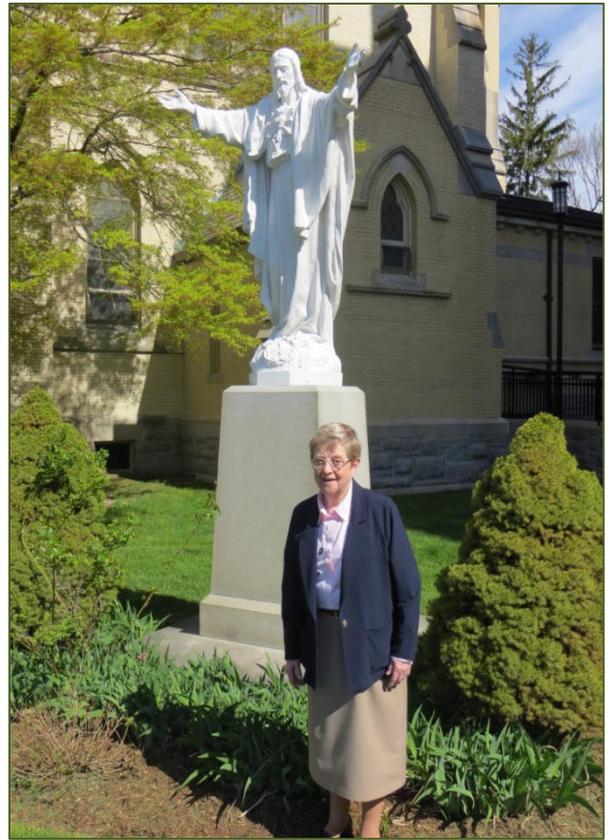


Sister Elizabeth Holler

To friends and associates, Sister Betty Holler is variously known as Sister Betty, Sister Elizabeth, Sister Mary Noel, or just “Noel.” However, no matter what name they use to refer to her, these friends and associates invariably add, “I just love her!” When you meet Sister Betty, the reason for this universal affection becomes clear. With quiet grace, she radiates God’s love to all those she encounters.

Sister Betty was the youngest of five children in a close-knit Catholic family in Newark, New Jersey. She attended St. Charles Borromeo School from grammar school through high school, where she was taught by the Sisters of Charity. She greatly admired the Sisters of Charity and wanted to be like them. “Some were gentle and some were what you could call strict, but the example I got from these sisters is what inspired me to become a sister.”

Sister Betty entered the Sisters of Charity in 1950 after graduation from high school. Her family was “a little surprised” by her decision, but they encouraged her to follow her calling. Homesickness caused her to question that calling, but support from her family and from the Director of Postulants helped her to work through the adjustment and stay on with the Sisters. “I realize now that becoming a Sister of Charity was the best decision I ever made.”



After graduating from the College of Saint Elizabeth, Sister Betty soon became immersed in the ministry of teaching. She began teaching at St. Mary’s School in Elizabeth and went on to St. Agnes School in Paterson and then to Our Lady of Victories School in Harrington Park. Over the years, she taught virtually every grade from kindergarten to eighth grade. She also served as principal for eleven years, using summers to earn a Masters in Administration and Supervision from Boston College. Because Sister Betty still lives in Harrington Park, she is often reunited with her former students. She is gratified when former students relate how much of a difference she made in their lives. “It’s humbling to learn that you had such an impact. And the students had just as much impact on me.”

After more than forty years in education, Sister Betty enthusiastically and graciously took up a new ministry in 1996 when she began serving as activities director at Saint Anne Villa, the assisted living and skilled care nursing facility for the Sisters of Charity. She worked hard to plan a variety of activities to not only entertain, but also to engage and challenge, the sisters at Saint Anne Villa. She also realized the importance of just being there to listen to and affirm the sisters who were struggling with failing health and old age.

The same gift for listening to and affirming others is now a key to Sister Betty’s current ministry as Pastoral Associate at Immaculate Conception Church in Norwood, a position she has held since 2002. She says, “I work with the home bound, people in nursing homes, in hospitals,” and then adds with a laugh, “and I do whatever else needs to be done.”

As a Pastoral Associate, Sister Betty visits many older people who have experienced some type of loss. She is very humble in relating what she does. “It’s not that I have all the answers, but they just need somebody to listen.” Sister Betty has visited many of the same people year after year, following them as they transitioned from their own homes into assisted living or nursing homes. “These people pour out their problems to me. They need to know that someone cares.”

Until two years ago, Sister Betty's ministry was a Pastoral Associate including responsibility for a bereavement counseling program. Sister Betty continues to use her training as a bereavement counselor, although she has now turned over the administration of the bereavement program to others.

Although Sister Betty works a full schedule, she takes time to relax now and then. She enjoys cooking, "when she has the time." She has been a life-long baseball fan, and remembers seeing Jackie Robinson play for the Brooklyn Dodgers at Ebbets Field. When asked about her current loyalties, she replies without hesitation that her team is the New York Mets.

Sister Betty says that the Sisters of Charity can look to the future with trust in God and faith that the current leadership will continue to lead the Congregation forward. She is always on the lookout to encourage young women to consider joining the Sisters of Charity. She mentions one young woman who works at a facility where Sister Betty visits. She suspects that this woman, who is clearly faithful and devoted to her Church, "might have 'an inkling.' I always let her know about Vocation Days and what's going on with the Sisters of Charity. She laughs when I tell her that I'm not giving up on her!"

Though occasionally tired, Sister Betty is thankful for her good health and has no plans for retirement anytime soon. In her ministry and in her everyday encounters with others, Sister Betty is always aware of her call to further the mission of Boundless Charity. "Boundless Charity means being always open. I want to try to be open to whatever comes my way, to do whatever I can to meet someone's needs."

She says that she "tries to listen to the voice of Grace." Those who hear Sister Betty's encouraging words and gentle laugh would agree that she not only listens, but humbly and joyously shares the voice of Grace with others.