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REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER ELIZABETH ANN STOCK **April 18, 1932–January 6, 2020**



“You’ve been friends for a long time, haven’t you?” This is the question that follows after someone expresses sorrow at the death of Sister Betty Stock. “Yes, we have . . . probably for more than 60 years . . . and that friendship continues . . . I am sure.”

When Betty suggested that I deliver this reflection we had no idea of the “when,” but in God’s Providence, her death occurred during the season of Epiphany and perfectly very close to the feast of her most favorite, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. I’m hoping to capture the two realities as illustrative of my friend and the special person she was.

Her personal file is chock full of biographic and demographic items that cause one to wonder how she packed all those experiences into 87 years. She once wrote that “one of my greatest joys in life is to be a Sister of Charity, a daughter of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton . . . which seems to be a part of me, even from my birth, but it was only later that I recognized it for the invitation it was and responded to it. I was baptized Elizabeth Ann, imagine!”

The second reality of her death during Epiphany picks up on the image of a journey: Magi traveling to follow a star leading them to the Lord Jesus. God’s will manifest to the Gentiles and how to spread the Word of Salvation resonated with a basic premise in the life and ministry of Sister Betty Stock.

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She had written of her belief that God speaks to us through people and through events. Confident that God had called her to follow Him as directed, Betty undertook her journey similar to the Magi, and determined to rely on God through thick and thin. Her file contains a letter for the Advancement Office in which Betty testifies to her love for the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill and the sisters she first met at Elizabeth Seton High School. After the love and lessons of her family, Betty came to recognize the importance of giving and helping others, promising to continue that ministry as long as she was able. She kept her promise.

Born in Pittsburgh on April 8, 1932, Elizabeth Ann (Betty) was the youngest of three girls born to Gilbert and Margaret Walker Stock. Her sister Mary, the eldest is deceased, Alberta Sherman, who is with us, is the mother of seven, who are also here with members of their families. Both of Betty's sisters and the nieces and nephews remained very close and supportive of Betty and each other over the years.

Betty entered the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1950 as part of the Holy Year group—28 postulants; when she received the habit, she received the religious name, Sister M. Assumpta. Her journey as a teacher began with a short time in fifth grade, then first or second grades for the next five years; Mother Claudia sent her to Our Lady of Lourdes School for African-American children in Abbeville, Louisiana, to teach a double grade (three and four). In 1958, she began to teach high school biology, general science, religion, and history at St. Anselm High School, Swissvale; I joined her there in 1959 as another faculty member. For the next 27 years, Betty taught the

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subjects of biology and religion in various high schools in the Pittsburgh Diocese. In 1962 she was assigned to the newly-opened Greensburg Central Catholic High School, and while waiting for the completion of the new Faculty House, Betty lived at Seton Hill College where the two of us shared sacristan duties in the Chapel.

I believe from all reports and from some of the tributes coming through social media, Betty was an excellent teacher who loved her students wanting the very best for them. That was apparent to me during the nine years we lived and worked together at Mon Valley Catholic. She was a thinker who faithfully prepared her classes, tutored students, and challenged those students who found study easy not to become complacent. Being a thinker herself may explain her desire to study theology and her eagerness to pursue a graduate degree and certification in religious studies. Not only was she a good teacher, she was also a serious student, receiving the BS in Elementary Education from Seton Hill University, an MA from Ohio State in Secondary Science Education, and in completing the requirements for a Master of Arts in Religious Education from St. Michael's College, Winooski, Vermont. After her ministry at Our Lady of Grace she had a sabbatical at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. These rich learning experiences were all part of her journey and the development of her knowledge and love of God and God's people.

Betty had served four years in the Office of Religious Education, secondary level with the Diocese of Pittsburgh. In 1989 she was assigned to Our Lady of Grace Parish as Pastoral Minister, a ministry very dear to her heart because

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was an opportunity to work with dedicated clergy and more directly with lay men and women in their service to the Church. As the recipient of the Paladin Grand Cross earlier in her teaching career, Betty was cited for being a driving force in successful efforts to create a missionary spirit among students and for her enthusiasm and zeal in spreading the faith.

Sister Betty never forgot her dedication to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and volunteered in numerous committees and activities in the Congregation and participated in civic and community projects. The list is long and spans many years. Sister Betty was a good writer and made contributions to *Charity Connections* and *Celebration*. She served as a member on the Formation Board, Chapter committees, East End Cooperative Ministries, People Concerned for the Unborn Child, and Mom's House. She attended forums and conferences related to her own professional development and to benefit the education and formation of her students. All of these professional activities highlighted her Epiphany journey to manifest the love of God to all.

Like Elizabeth Seton, her namesake, she maintained connections with family, former students, and many friends. She continued her study of the life and virtue of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, wrote articles, and made presentations concerning her special friend. Her Thursday morning group, "Journey with Elizabeth," provided the time and space to reflect with others sisters on the stories of our own deceased sisters and how they revealed the Charity Charism in their time and place.

The journey motif does reflect a large part of the life of Sister Betty Stock especially when I think of her eagerness to travel . . . she loved to drive . . . to

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be on the go, no desire to sit back or stop. She was the one who insisted that *I needed a vacation* and suggested places, organized the arrangements, and readily told others that *I needed to relax* and enjoy life more. As always she was right!

She wouldn't forgive me if I didn't mention her love of not just baseball, but the Pittsburgh Pirates. She recalled how her father, who died when she was 13, listened faithfully to Rosy Rosewell and that was a special memory for her. Betty joined Berta in being #1 fans, cheering the Pirates on, even when the situation looked hopeless.

Yes, 60 years plus is a long time—measured in laughter, worries, and tears, lots of family and community celebrations, phone calls, visits now and again, and praying and sharing on many topics related to Church and politics. In those 60 years, we had reached a basic understanding and acceptance of a belief Betty had written at the age of 18 in her initial request for admission to the community: “I want to become a religious because the religious life seems to hold for me the key to the peace known only by those who do God’s most Holy Will. One needs that key to open the door to Eternal Happiness.” Elizabeth Ann Seton said something very similar: “One thing only am I sure of, that our God will turn all for the best.”

Rest in peace, dear Betty . . . God has turned the key of welcome to your eternal happiness.

Funeral Liturgy, Reflection

Sister Jean Augustine

January 9, 2020

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