For Betty Whittier

May 2, 1923 - January 23, 2021

I have just a few remarks to make on this day that we commend our beloved Betty Whittier into the care of our gracious and loving God.

I first want to say that the pandemic has affected all aspects of life, including our rituals of mourning. In normal times, which we all vaguely remember, this service would be in a full church with music and communion. In normal times, all of Betty's family would be here from around the country.

But as you know we are not living in normal times. So I am glad that we can at least do this service for Betty's family who live here, and for her friends from church and other parts of her life.

I know that Betty's family plans to have a celebration of her when they can safely travel. That will be the time for telling family stories and remembering their remarkable mother and grandmother.

But today I'd like to share a few stories about Betty's life at St. Dunstan's and the importance of faith in her life.

I remember the first time I met Betty in August of 2004. It was my first week at St. Dunstan's and I was making my first hospital call, going to visit Bill Barnett. (father of Tom Barnett). Betty was great friends with Bill's wife, Norma, and she also came to visit, bringing Norma a roll of quarters to use in the vending machines. So my first impression of Betty was that she was a good and thoughtful friend.

Betty wasn't a charter member of St. Dunstan's, but she was pretty close. She'd been a Baptist and a Catholic in earlier life, but once she got to St. Dunstan's and become an Episcopalian that's where she stayed.

Betty was active in all aspects of church life. She was on the vestry, she was the church treasurer and served on the altar guild. She participated in Sunday School and study groups and was in the pew almost every Sunday.

As someone new to the parish, I quickly realized that Betty was someone I could call and ask questions of and use as a sounding board. She knew where the landmines were and steered me away from them a time or two, for which I am eternally grateful.

And I knew that if what I was thinking was a bad idea she wouldn't hesitate to tell me. Honesty and forthrightness were at the core of who she was.

There are two things she said to me that I will always remember. When I had been there about a year, she came to me and said, "I need to tell you something. When we started looking for a new priest I wrote a letter to the search committee and told them we should not hire a woman."

It wasn't that she was against women priests. It was just that St. Dunstan's had had a woman as rector for a number of years, and she thought it was time to have a man in that position.

She wanted to tell me this, she said, because she didn't want me to hear from someone else and then have me think she was against women clergy. And, she added, she wanted to tell me she had been wrong and she was glad the search committee had not followed her advice.

We live in a culture in which it is often difficult to admit to being wrong, or admit that our thinking has changed. Betty showed that can be done with graciousness and good humor.

One last thing that I will always remember is what she said to me on my 50th birthday. It happened to fall on Ash Wednesday, so Betty was in church that day.

"So you're 50?" she said to me after the service. "Well, you should know that 40 is the old age of youth, but 50 is the youth of old age."

The church was important to Betty, not just because of the friends she had there, or the activities she was involved in. The church was the place where her faith was grounded. Taking communion was important to her. Following the teachings of Jesus was important to her. And so was having her new residences blessed, both at Mt. Vernon Towers and Benton House.

Now Betty is in a new residence that has already been blessed, reunited with Philip, her parents, and so many friends who have gone before her. It's a place where scripture tells us the wine flows freely, a place of abundance, a place where all are welcome, and all are restored to wholeness and health.

And so Betty, may the angels lead you into paradise.

May Philip and all the saints rise up to greet you.

And may you be welcomed into the loving arms of a gracious God who says to you,

"Well done, good and faithful servant. Welcome home."

Amen.