In writing her life story, Sister Betty Condon began with her great-grandparents, who left behind their Irish roots in Killarney and Cork and braved the difficult Atlantic crossing to begin new lives in America. They settled in Charleston, South Carolina, and it was there that, two generations later, Martha Igoe and Matthew Condon met as they each chaperoned the younger members of their respective families at a party.

Martha and Matthew were married in July 1913, and the next year a daughter, Mary Caroline, came into the family. Caroline was followed by James, Martha, Matthew, Elizabeth -- who was always called Betty -- on November 12, 1925, and Mary Clare. Caroline died of blood poisoning at the age of thirteen, while away at a boarding school. Betty was just three years old, but despite being so young at the time she always recalled that someone told her to look up at the stars and know Caroline was looking down at her.

Neither Martha nor Matthew had completed high school; Martha, who was the eldest, left high school to help care for her siblings, while Matthew left school at fourteen to work in the department store his parents had started.

In her life story, Sister Betty wrote that her parents were “total gift” to her and her brothers and sisters. “We never heard our parents complain about their lives,” she wrote, “and they were always the foundation of our lives and encouraged us to be the best we could, without pressuring us.” It was surely a source of great pride to them that four of their children were able to go to college.

Sister Betty attended Sacred Heart and St. Patrick grade schools and Bishop England High School in Charleston, and met the Adrian Dominicans when she went to Barry College (University) in Miami Shores, Florida. “I loved the Sisters for their great joy,” she wrote, and on September 8, 1946, after graduating from Barry, she entered the Congregation. She became a novice and received her religious name, Sister Martha Marie, the next year.

While she was deeply committed to her vocation, living in the North was difficult for her, and she often felt homesick for her family and friends and her beloved South. “I realized the northern Midwest culture was not for me,” she wrote.

Happily, after profession in August 1948 she was missioned to St. Anastasia School in Fort Pierce, Florida, for one year, followed by two years at Little Flower School in Hollywood, Florida. This was a new school, and she enjoyed being part of such an experience. She taught third and then second grades, with Sister Bibiana Singer as her principal and superior. “Standing at the door of my classroom, she enjoyed my teaching phonics with my southern accent!” she wrote.

Another opportunity to begin something new came in 1951, when she was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, to help open St. Matthew’s School. She spent ten years there, during which time she earned her master’s degree from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. In 1961, she was assigned to be superior/principal at Our Lady Help of Christians in Aiken, South Carolina, “thus coming full circle by returning to the area of my birth.”
It was a challenging assignment, because Aiken “was a combination of the cultural South and high-powered, pressured families of nuclear physicists who worked at the Savannah River plant,” she wrote. More challenges came after she completed her six-year term there and was sent back to St. Matthew’s in Jacksonville; tensions in the school and in the convent led her to ask to be changed.

Sister Betty spent the summer of 1968 working in the social work division of the Henderson Psychiatric Clinic in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Between that experience and the opportunity to make a Marriage Encounter retreat that summer as well, she began to feel she needed a change in ministry, away from the classroom.

She was assigned next to teach at St. Jude School in St. Petersburg, Florida, but after just a short time there was led to request a leave of absence from the Congregation. This lasted for four months, during which time she got to know the Adrian Dominicans at St. Mary’s in Georgetown, South Carolina -- Sisters Judith Benkert and Betty Lou Myers – and after her leave ended in January 1969 she went to that school herself. When St. Mary’s closed in 1970, she was invited to go to the Springbank Christian Center in Kingstree, South Carolina, by its director, Father John Egan, OP.

In addition to being part of the Springbank team, she taught in an all-African American school in the area and saw it through its time of integration with an all-white school. Later, she became a counselor in the county mental health clinic, helping clients transition back home after spending time in the mental hospital. “I loved the people and those I worked with,” she wrote in her life story. “They were very poor but spiritually rich in an earthy sort of way.”

In 1976 she was elected a Co-Provincial of the St. Rose of Lima Province, which was headquartered in West Palm Beach, Florida. After her three-year term ended, she returned to South Carolina, where she entered the Clinical Pastoral Education program at the Morris Village drug and alcohol treatment facility in Columbia and then was a counselor and consultant for a family shelter, also in Columbia.

Springbank had closed its doors by this time, but in 1980 Sister Betty became part of the discussions about its reopening, and spent the next seven years (1981-1988) working there. In 1988, a whole different world was opened to her when she went to Kisumu, Kenya, to assist – and to have some personal time – at the Ukweli Reflection Centre, a retreat facility. She spent almost a year there before returning to Springbank in September 1989 but, feeling called once again to Kenya, she went back to the retreat center there in 1990.

Sister Betty came home a year later to participate in meetings related to the upcoming General Chapter, fully intending to return to Kenya after that. But her oldest sister Martha became sick, and she moved in with her to care for her in her final years. “I thought I was her spiritual director in the beginning of this time, but realized she became my guide in showing me how to die,” she wrote.

After Martha’s passing, Sister Betty completed the formation work in spiritual direction which she had begun during her time with her sister, and this planted the seeds of her last ministry. She and Sister Barbara Hubbard teamed up to open and co-direct Sea of Peace House of Prayer, a retreat center on Edisto Island, South Carolina, in 1995.

After eleven years of that ministry, Sisters Betty and Barbara returned to Adrian, where Sister Betty was a spiritual director, helped out as a librarian, taught at the literacy center, served as a Eucharistic minister, and was a delegate to the Holy Rosary Chapter Mission Council. She and Sister Barbara lived together at the Dominican Life Center until Sister Barbara’s passing in 2018.

Sister Betty wrapped up her life story, completed in 2015, by quoting Oswald Chambers: “Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading.”
“I believe God is leading me into letting go of much of what life has been to me in the past,” she wrote. “I’m content to lead a simpler and simpler life, yet being more and more at peace. We are blessed with all that life offers us here at the DLC. I am finding it harder and harder to let go of many of my friends entering into the fullness of eternal life with God. I grieve over the loss of their company … the paradox of life. Since I’ll be 90 in November I’m ready to join them, but God has other plans for me now and so I need to be grateful and live in his Holy Mystery … in the Holy Mystery of Life!”

Just as she had noted at the beginning of her story that she was always called “Betty” by her family, never “Elizabeth,” she signed the last page “Elizabeth Igoe Condon, just Betty.”

Sister Betty died on November 18, 2018, aged ninety-three, having outlived her good friend and partner in ministry Sister Barbara by exactly six months.

Sister Joanne Peters, Co-Chapter Prioress of the Holy Rosary Mission Chapter, noted in her eulogy that Betty had included in her life story the Bible passage which Betty said “has been woven into my vocation as church”:

To the victorious I will give hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Rev. 3:13)

“Betty had many white stones with different messages for herself alone,” Sister Joanne said. “She found God, her love, she stayed in love. She and the Spirit decided everything.”

The next day’s funeral homily was preached by Sister Maria Goretti Browne, who noted that Sister Betty had faced the many adversities and losses in her life with an absolute belief that God would make good come out of those experiences.

In all of the readings Betty left for us that we heard today¹ we learned of her DEEP faith and absolute trust in the God she kept close in her heart daily.

Betty’s earthly presence, her earthly body with all her Southern graciousness, is gone, but she has left us with the beauty of our memories of her, with the example of courage and strength to face the end of our lives. So, Betty, we ask you to remember us as you enjoy the eternal sea of peace and happiness you are now experiencing before the throne of God.

¹ Romans 8:28-39, Psalm 139, John 11:24-27
Left: Sisters at Barry College (University), before 1958, are: front row, from left, Sisters Veronica Gonthier, Jacqueline Marie Roy, Felix Palda, and Joan Loeffler; middle row, from left, Sisters Marie Philomena Mahan, Maria Riley, Paul Anton Michels, Mary Russell, and Virginia Beattie; and back row, from left, Sisters Benita Bourne, Betty Condon, Maureen Lathers, Clarice Moyle, Grace Flowers, and Audrey Hull.

Left: Sister Betty with Franciscan Sisters in Kenya
From left: Members of the Double Diamond Class of 2017 are: standing, from left, Sisters JoAnn Fleischaker, Patricia Siemen (Prioress), Noreen O’Connell, and Sarah Cavanaugh; and seated, from left, Sisters Charlotte Hoefer, Eileen Meyers, and Betty Condon. Sister Betty in her Irish dancing dress while she was a student at Barry

Left: Sisters Betty Condon (left) and Barbara Hubbard
From left: Members of the Appalachian Mission Group: standing, from left, Sisters Patricia Benson, Geraldine Megel, Mary Katherine Drouin, Barbara Hubbard, Betty Condon, Mary Kathryn Cliatt, and Helen Diane McGuirt, and kneeling, from left, Sisters Attracta Kelly and Francine Barber, Ashley Gonzalez (in formation) and Sisters June Racicot and Maria Goretti Browne. In St. Catherine of Siena Library, Madden Hall, Adrian

From left: Spending time together during ministry in Africa are, from left, Sisters Joanne Peters, Virginia Hafey-Wells, Betty Condon, and Kathleen McGrail. Sister Betty with Father John Egan, OP