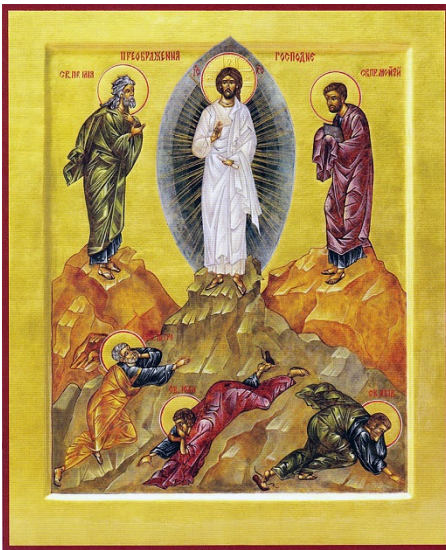


SR. EDNA ENGLISH, DW
Sr. Anne Gregory of the Cross
60TH Jubilee Celebration

BEGINNINGS



Edna says that she will always be grateful for all the ways in which her family influenced her. Her parents were so deeply Christian that the family shared scripture every day. And so, the morning that Edna entered Maryview Nursing School to begin her studies, she was an upstanding Protestant, who had never before seen a Catholic. Two years later Edna became a Catholic

When she finished nursing school, she remained at Maryview to work on Unit 6, the African American unit with a men's ward and a woman's ward at one end of a long corridor, and the maternity ward at the other. At that time the two races were still strictly separated in Virginia, and the facilities for African Americans were often smaller and poorer than those for whites. However, Sr. Mary of the Purification was Edna's supervisor, and she made it clear that the patients of Unit 6 were to be treated with the same respect that other patients were treated. This sparked something in Edna. She felt a longing to be more than she was

in her present state. As she put it, "becoming a nun seemed the way to go".

THE ROAD LESS CHOSEN

On December 8th, Edna told her parents that she wanted to become a nun, and, understandably, both of them were upset by this. Then, unexpectedly, seven weeks later, her beloved 'daddy' died of a heart attack. The neighbors told Edna's 'momma' that Edna's decision had killed him. And so, Edna delayed her entrance into the convent for another year. Then she told her mother that she felt she really had to try religious life, and she reassured her mother that if she found in her heart of hearts that this was not the path for her, she would definitely come home again. The rest is history.

Edna writes, "Over the past 60 years, I have felt my parents' influence in my life over and over again. I think that one of the greatest gifts they ever gave me was to question honestly what I was doing and why."

NURSING – COMPASSION, NOT JUST A JOB

From Maryview, where she started, Edna learned that the patients who came to Unit 6 were like every other patient she had ever had except for one thing. All the doctors that these black persons had had for their families were black, but there were no black doctors on the staff of Maryview Hospital at that time. So, they had to have a white doctor, and, often enough, there were difficulties and misunderstanding. Many times, it was the nurses and aides that made these people feel secure and at home. Not only that. Edna says that it was not just one patient but so many patients that taught her lessons. In her own words, "I really think they gave me so much, and I hope I gave them something."

In 1959, Edna, then a fully professed Daughter of Wisdom, began to serve as nursing supervisor at St. Charles Hospital in Brooklyn where she remained for five years. Of this period in her life she wrote, "the place that gave me the most was St. Charles, Brooklyn. This was a hospital for children with orthopedic problems. These children stayed with us for months and even years. Even today, I can tell you the names of so many of them and the specific illness of each of them. In a way, we became parents for them. The lessons I learned there have become and still are a big part of my nursing today."

UNEXPECTED DIRECTIONS

After leaving Brooklyn in 1964, Edna served as supervising head nurse at St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson. In 1970 she earned her Bachelor's Degree in Nursing at Adelphi University, and in 1977, her Master's Degree in Nursing from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

From then on, her ministry would be in her native State of North Carolina. She began as a nursing consultant at the Eastern Regional Office in Greenville and later worked as a consultant for both the Duplin County Health Department in Kenansville, NC, and Hyde County Health Department in Swan Quarter, NC. Those of our sisters who have had the good fortune to visit North Carolina have been deeply impressed by how widely Edna is known and how highly she is regarded there.

After her retirement from nursing in 1995, Edna has been Director of Religious Education at St. Gabriel Church in Greenville, NC. She serves on the planning and zoning Board of Greenville, NC as well as the Board of the Sheppard Memorial Library. Finally, she holds a court-appointed position As Guardian ad litem – by helping infants, minors, and mentally challenged persons to get the help they need to protect their rights in court.

IN HER OWN WAY

Here we let Edna say it all in her own words: "I feel as if my life has always been a search. After I had sort of backed my way into religious life, I asked for a Bible. But in those days no DW had her own Bible, and my request fell on deaf ears. So, outwardly, I did my best to pray with the group, but deep in my heart I sought God the only way I knew how. Then at the time of Vatican II, the Church changed, and I finally got my bible, still a treasured source of life for me."

"I also got into this Buddhist way of prayer, and I still use this way of beginning my daily prayer."

"Finally, I began to read about native American beliefs. Rita Finnen and I participated together in a three-month Sabbatical, and what I learned there has become part of me and is still very important to me. For me, Wisdom is the Great Spirit, who is in everything and holds all things together."

COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Edna gratefully acknowledges the part played in her life by many different people, but for her, Rita Finnen played the most important role. Edna wrote, "I met her in 1952 when she first came to Maryview – she, the nun, met me, the Protestant. She was there when I was baptized a Catholic. And then there were a number of years when we saw each other only occasionally."

"Then I got to know her better when she became Superior at St. Charles Hospital, Port Jefferson. After that we still met off and on, certainly more frequently than at first."

"In 1974, I began working in Greenville, and in 1976 Rita moved here. For forty years, until her death in 2016, we had the grace of living together in community. We have shared so much. I treasure her memory and thank God for her presence in my life."



Thank you, Edna!