

A Good Word for Mary

August 8, 2015

Mary Elizabeth Edens was Park Road Baptist Church. I don't know how else to say it. She was a charter member of this congregation, a teenager when a small group of Baptists began meeting in Park Road Elementary school in 1950. No one has spent more time on the grounds at 3900 Park Road in the last six and a half decades. No one knew this church, its members, its history better than Mary Edens.

Mary prepared the newsletters and delivered them, weekly, to the bulk mail center. She prepared the weekly children's worship bags, and enlarged the hymns to be used in each week's worship service, placing them in notebooks for two members who had a hard time reading from the hymnal. She collected the money for our Wednesday night fellowship suppers – and she would let you know if you had missed a payment! (About every month she would show up at my desk, and just stand there, with her little tally sheet in hand. Usually she didn't have to say anything, and when I'd pull out my checkbook to catch up on what the Dean family owed, she'd just laugh!)

Mary always provided a final proof-reading of the bulletin before it was printed. She folded it and added any inserts, and after worship each Sunday she collected the used bulletins and recycled them. She ordered our Sunday school curriculum twice a year and kept the filing system in my office, sermons, studies,

magazine and newspaper clippings for my topical files. She was the final word on the accuracy of our membership directory, updated each year – and after it was printed, she would take Amy's copy and pencil in the names and phone numbers of grown children of elderly members, lake house numbers, other pertinent, personal information. She kept our Pastoral Care file up-to-date with obituaries and other newspaper notices and other information related to church members. On Sundays she always checked the parament, aligning it with the liturgical color of the season, and she hung any banner, appropriate for that day's worship.

When we had flowers in worship, she placed the urns in the sanctuary on Friday, in preparation for the florist's delivery on Saturday. She watered the plants in the office and her Sunday school room. Brenda recently discovered why there were always several pitchers of water under the sink in the staff break room. Brenda realized that Mary would fill these and store them there, so she could provide room temperature water for all her plants! Mary answered countless phone calls, and walked countless paces up and down the corridor from office to chapel to Child Development Center, providing direction to visitors and vendors. Mary was a co-teacher in her Sunday school class and served as our unofficial church historian. She knew all of those church scrapbooks, because she had created most of them, and had often scoured their pages looking for tidbits of history. Mary kept the office stocked with bus tokens which we give to the down-and-out who frequently stop by

the office looking for assistance. She kept up with our inventory and when we were in short supply, she would make a trip to the transit center, and she we never allow us to reimburse her for the purchase of a new book of tickets.

I could tell you that Mary was remembered by her Aunt Iris as a sweet child and a good student. I could tell you about all the trips they enjoyed together: Hawaii, Europe, Washington and trips all across this country. I could tell you of her 43 year career with First Union Bank. I could tell you she was respected because of the consistent, trustworthy service she provided. I could tell you she rose in her position to become a Trust Officer, because she was careful and meticulous and developed relationships with customers who trusted her wisdom and her advice on personal and financial matters. I could tell you that Mary knew the city of Charlotte like the back of her hand. That before I had a GPS, I didn't need one – I had Mary!

I could tell you that Mary Edens, who was born to a modest family living in a modest home on the property of what is now Park Road Shopping Center, developed a love for the arts. I could tell you that hardly an Opera came to town, for which Mary did not have a ticket. I could tell you about all the times she came to my office with a playbill or a program she had picked up from a museum, an art gallery, a program she had seen on PBS. I could tell you she was an avid reader, and that she had more than made up for the college education she never got by the

courses she took with the American Banking Institute, and by her own, diligent will and her thirsty mind. I could tell you she was a good neighbor, and that she kept in touch with friends. I could tell you that the annual Christmas card she received for many years from Billy Graham, whose family farm had made them neighbors almost 70 years ago, would attest to that.

I could tell you that Mary Edens loved art, and had collected beautiful pieces from around the world, and that she was an artist in her own right. I could tell you about her years of membership, and leadership in the Embroidery Guild, the American Needlepoint Guild, the Sampler's Guild, the Charlotte Quilters Guild. I could tell you about the hours she poured into needlepoint pieces, the detail of which would make most people go blind! I could tell you about the chairs on this rostrum, and how protective she was of her handiwork that graces these cushions.

I could tell you of Mary's many friends, none who have ever said a bad word about her. I could tell you about her 60-year friendship with Jimmy Bookout, who was faithful to the end. I could tell you of their years of bank meetings and socials with their bank "family," of the shows they saw together, the trips they took together, the every-Sunday-night meal they enjoyed together for years and years and years.

There is so much I could tell you about a remarkable woman named Mary Elizabeth Edens. But all I really know about Mary is that she was Park Road Baptist Church. I don't know how else to say it.

The 65-year old membership log of this congregation is a large ledger book that is kept in our upstairs office storage area. We affectionately refer to it as "the Lamb's Book of life." Before the invention of the personal computer and the software database... there was the Lamb's Book of Life and Mary's trusty ball point pen, steely memory, and unfailing dedication. I don't know who kept that book before her. I don't know who will take up the mantle now that she is gone. I do know that it is fitting that the names and dates of so many are inscribed on those pages in her handwriting. It's a symbolic way of suggesting that she touched all of us. The dates of joining and baptism and death, are etched permanently in her sturdy, cursive hand. It's one more place Mary's touch will live on in the church she so fiercely loved. I am saddened that today we have to add one more date to that book, and I'm sorry that today Mary won't be the one doing the recording.

But as much as Mary knew about everything Park Road, there was an odd gap in her knowledge that spanned 20-plus years. Sometimes we would ask Mary to tell us about someone we had heard had been a long-time member, or had contributed in some significant way, and Mary would say, "I don't know them. That was in my years with the children." Mary Edens was not the warm, cuddle type, she was not

always the most pleasing voice to hear on the telephone, she had a sometimes stern face that brought some trepidation (various staff members have actually admitted... they were a little afraid of her!)... yes, that Mary Edens spent more than 20 years working with children with disabilities. Every Sunday morning at Park Road Baptist Church, for the two hours of Sunday school and worship, Mary and a few other compassionate souls spent their mornings caring for children with physical and mental disabilities.

I think that says everything about Mary. Who knew? She was quiet, unassuming, unpretentious, and that outer layer, weathered by years of careful attention to detail hid the soft core of a heart of compassion that loved her church and her friends and all of her children.

As a pastor, I always end a eulogy by reflecting on the faith of the deceased, but I think I already have done that.

For Mary Elizabeth Edens, thanks be to God.