

AROUND THE DIOCESE

Lenten reflections on the life of a parish nurse

BY GISELE MCKNIGHT

During the Lenten season, we are encouraged to reflect. With that in mind, the ACW of Christ Church Cathedral invited their recently retired parish nurse, Isabel Cutler, to present a reflection on her life.

This is a report from that Feb. 17 meeting — Isabel's life reflection, not only her comings and goings, but the communities she became a part of, and the warmth and love of Christ she found in the people with whom she has crossed paths.

She entitled her presentation, "The challenge is to be me, with God's grace — an ongoing life adventure."

"Lent is a time of reflection," said Isabel. "We reflect on our lives, so I've had this opportunity to pause, reflect on God's presence in my life and his leading me where he wanted me to be."

"The challenge is to be who God wants me to be."

Isabel is 69, newly retired after 50 years of nursing. Her final assignment, for the past 10 years, has been as the parish nurse at Christ Church Cathedral.

"The last part of my career was definitely the icing on the cake for me," she said.

She is a wife, mother and grandmother, and recently diagnosed with a chronic disease that requires daily medication. Now, she told her audience, she has to do what she's pleaded with patients to do throughout her career — take their medication!

Born in Yorkshire, England, Isabel was raised in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. An only child, she always lived in a hospital setting, because her mother was an assistant matron and her father taught nurses' training.

"It was a wonderful sense of community even though I didn't have siblings," she said.

She told of the Scottish fishermen and their wives who would come to Norfolk to fish each year. The crowd would come to Isabel's home for



MCKNIGHT PHOTO

Newly retired parish nurse Isabel Cutler during a Lenten presentation Feb. 17. At top right, Isabel as she looked a few decades ago as a public health nurse working on the south coast of Newfoundland & Labrador.

prayer meetings, sharing their faith and their stories, while her mother and father served tea and sandwiches.

"It was a real Christian community, even though I didn't realize what it was at the time," she said.

Isabel went to boarding school at age 10, and when she finished her education she was absolutely sure of what she did not want to do.

"I said I was never, never, never going to be a nurse," she said. "But all of a sudden, I changed my mind."

Her mother sent her to St. George's Hospital in London for initial training, after which she chose midwifery and public health on which to focus. She was sent to Walton on Thames in Surrey for training in public health services to the poor of the community.

In the town there was a couple with a new baby who had been born at home without any medical intervention whatsoever. The parents had refused to let anyone in their house, least of all anyone

official.

For whatever reason, it fell to Isabel to visit them as a public health nurse. Nervous and afraid as she approached the house, she prayed for guidance.

What she found inside was a desperate couple needing help but afraid authorities would take their six-month-old child, who had multiple disabilities. Isabel reassured them and gave them the help they needed.

Two years later, looking for adventure, Isabel applied for a new job. That brought her to the International Grenfell Association in St. Anthony, Newfoundland & Labrador.

Her arrival was most unwelcoming. She was a passenger in a six-seater plane that skidded sideways down the runway before stopping at the terminal — a Nissen hut.

"I was the public health nurse for the whole peninsula area," she said, adding she used snowmobiles, boats and a Jeep to get around.

In Newfoundland, she met

the man she still calls the love of her life, Nathan Cutler. He was a student at Memorial University who eventually became an educational psychologist. They married the day after he graduated with a bachelor's degree.

Working in various places in Newfoundland and eventually in New Brunswick, she was blessed with communities that welcomed her and demonstrated their great care of people and faith in God.

In New Brunswick in the 1990s, she and Nathan began a business developing software to help special needs children. Isabel worked at both the hospital and the business.

Throughout their careers and married lives, both Isabel and Nathan felt great stirrings to investigate further ministry — even the priesthood. Both were accepted by ACPO (Advisory Committee On Postulants for Ordination) at various points in their lives. Isabel even began studies at Atlantic School of Theology. Neither, however, pursued it, feeling



it was not right for them, and have found other ways to serve God.

"Parish nursing at the Cathedral has been a blessing for me," she said. "It's the joy of collegiality, not just with the parish nursing team, but with the congregation too. We've had a lot of support and care from a lot of people."

Finally retired, Isabel devotes herself to her family, including her grandchildren. One recent bonus has been finding her half-sister, whose birth was the result of her father's lapse when Isabel was a teenager. Her sister is German.

Not long ago, Isabel typed her sister's name into Facebook, found a woman with that name, sent a private message and got a prompt and positive reply. Her sister was living in Saskatchewan at the time but has since moved to Spain. They have talked on the phone.

Isabel left her ACW audience with an excerpt from the book, "In Age Reborn" by Sister Thelma Ann SSJD. These are words taken from a retreat led by Margaret Silf and worthy of reflection during this Lenten season:

"Each of us walks a pathway through life and that pathway is unique. If I do not walk it in a way that makes me a channel of grace, no one ever will. My particular track, traced through my life events, my relationships, my unique mix of gifts and weaknesses... is becoming a channel of God's redeeming love, if I am willing to live through, with and in God."

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