

FEATURE

Octogenarian relishes peace work

By Nancy Hartnagel
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — In Eileen Egan's life and work, peace has been the constant.

For nearly four decades, she represented Catholic Relief Services, the overseas aid agency of the U.S. Catholic community, to people made homeless and poor by wars and disasters.

As one of the Catholic Worker family in New York, she served up soup, hospitality and, at the Worker's Friday night meetings, talks on the needs she saw abroad.

She lobbied bishops on war and peace issues at the Second Vatican Council and U.S. bishops' meetings. In the 1960s, she co-founded the American PAX Association, which became Pax Christi U.S.A., a branch of the international peace organization.

She first pressed the U.N. Human Rights Commission to declare conscientious objection a human right in 1970, and 17 years later, the resolution passed.

She has written extensively: numerous essays and articles for *The Catholic Worker* newspaper and other publications; books about CRS, refugees and the works of mercy as works of peace; biographies of such friends as Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day.

Currently, she is completing another book — *The First Generation Since Genesis* — entirely on peace. It will include a theology of peace based on the Sermon on the Mount, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the Our Father as the ultimate peace prayer.

All of these are interrelated, Egan told Catholic News Service during a May interview at her upper East Side apartment in New York.

"Peace is a constituent element of the Gospel," she said. "And I think all of us, as an expression of our faith, should be working for peace. It's just a simple expression of our faith."

Egan, now in her 80s, is the oldest of six children born to an Irish couple in Wales.



Nancy Wiehock/CNS

Eileen Egan's life's work is peace.

The Egans emigrated to the United States in 1926, when Egan was 14.

"I became very aware of the needs of refugees and how you have to treat them," she said. "When I came with CRS, I realized that ... refugees wanted to be served by their own group or the group of their religion."

After graduating from Cathedral High School and Hunter College in New York, Egan assumed responsibility for her siblings when both parents died suddenly a few years apart in the '30s. She taught, then worked for a Catholic organization providing social services for war workers.

Egan joined the brand-new CRS in 1943, becoming the first layperson and first woman on the staff.

Over the next years, she visited ongoing CRS aid projects and helped develop new ones throughout Europe, Asia and Latin America. She filled notebook after notebook, later using the details to flesh out

the 12 books she has written, co-written or edited.

Her worst memories are tied to "the evil in human hearts that is willing to condone the inflicting of suffering or killing on others." Her best memories are of the people who "have seen so much suffering, and yet they come out with not only great love, but great energy for the works of love."

Two such people — Mother Teresa, founder of the Missionaries of Charity, and Dorothy Day, co-founder of the the Catholic Worker movement — became great friends. Each described her work with the poor and outcast in terms of ministering to Jesus "in his distressing disguise," whatever it might be.

War and peace concerns prompted Egan to go to Rome for the final session of Vatican II in 1965. She lobbied prelates behind the scenes for changes in the document that became the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

"Wasn't it wonderful that the one condemnation of the whole four years of Vatican II was the condemnation of indiscriminate warfare," she remarked.

Egan's commitment to nonviolence extends to her own life. In 1992, she was the victim of a violent street mugging. She forgave her assailant, a homeless man, at his trial, and despite having suffered a broken hip and broken ribs, observed that his torments probably were greater than her own.

"The only accomplishment that I would hope for is not mine but to become the channel to make known the theology of peace that's in the New Testament," she said.

"We can't be overwhelmed by the sufferings," Egan added, "because there's so much joy — the Mass, and all the good people that are struggling and all the funny things that happen in life."

St. Ann's to construct senior living complex

St. Ann's of Greater Rochester has begun construction of Chapel Oaks, Inc., a senior living community to be located on the St. Ann's campus, 1500 Portland Ave., Irondequoit.

The new community will provide 120 one- and two-bedroom apartments. The complex will also offer a library, a community center, a restaurant-style dining room, private dining rooms, scheduled activities and transportation, security, and house-keeping and maintenance services. Residents also may take advantage of services available at St. Ann's Home.

Construction of the complex began May 20. The project is scheduled for completion in September 1997.

Apartments will be priced at \$1,295-\$2,890 per month.

Applications are currently being accepted; a number of the apartments have already been reserved.

For information, call 716/342-3052.

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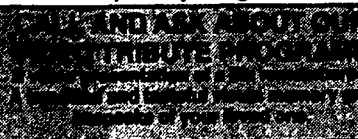
Thoughts to Consider



EDWIN SULEWSKI
Funeral Director

What are some ways to help a child who has lost a parent?

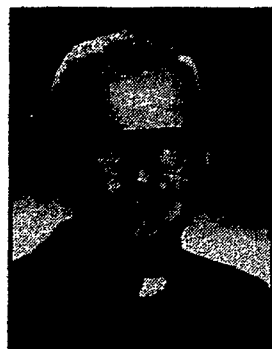
First it is important to make sure the child is honestly included in all the information and planning. This means being honest about the death and answering the child's questions. It also means allowing but not forcing children to go to the funeral or visitation as they wish. Secondly, a child needs love and security. Let a child know they will be cared for, take an interest in schoolwork and include them in play. Some children resent being pressured to accept burdens beyond their reach. "Taking over for Dad or Mom" may be too much responsibility. Naturally, changes will occur but a child needs time and help in adjusting to them.



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Nine Days of Prayers
July 17 to 25, 1996 at 7:30 PM
Evening Prayer, Sermon, Novena Prayers

- Wednesday, July 17Moment by Moment.....*Matthew 6:26-34*
- Thursday, July 18Other Side of the Coin.....*Ephesians 4:30-32*
- Friday, July 19Misleading Futurism.....*I Corinthians 15:1-10*
- Saturday, July 20Stop, Look and Listen.....*Romans 11:33-36*
- Sunday, July 21You Never Walk Alone.....*John 14:23-26*
- Monday, July 22Gospel Portrait.....*Luke 2:25-35*
- Tuesday, July 23"Christified".....*John 6:52-58*
- Wednesday, July 24My Bags are Packed.....*Romans 14:7-9*
- Thursday, July 25With the One.....*Colossians 3:12-17*

Feast of Saints Anne & Joachim
Friday, 26 July 1996 at 7:30 PM
Solemn Celebration of the Eucharist

For the Novena days • Organist: Brink Bush • Cantor: Lorne Altman
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