

SISTER EMILY MARIE WALSH



The people of Holy Trinity Church in Hackensack fondly refer to Sister Emily Walsh as “the heart and soul of the parish.” Still going strong after more than 75 years in her religious vocation, Sister Emily continues to serve God’s people in a full and active ministry she humbly describes as the “simple work of a Sister of Charity.”

Sister Emily was born in Montclair, New Jersey, in 1921. She was the oldest of nine children in her family. Emily attended grammar school at Our Lady of Lourdes School in West Orange. As a young girl, she was always interested in religious life and liked to hear about her two cousins who were nuns. She especially loved the Sisters of Charity who taught her in school.

Emily’s teachers at Our Lady of Lourdes recognized Emily’s interest in a religious vocation and suggested that she consider enrolling in the Juniorate of the Sisters of Charity for her high school years. “The more the Sisters talked to me about it, the more I liked the idea.” Emily’s mother supported her decision to enroll in the Juniorate, though it took her father longer to come around. “I always wanted to be a nurse, and my father thought I should stay at home to be a nurse. I told him that I could be a Sister Nurse as a Sister of Charity.”

Emily entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of Charity in 1938. Because there were plenty of nurses in the Community already and Catholic schools were booming at the time, Sister Emily did not become a nurse but instead became a teacher. In 1939, she took on her first teaching assignment by teaching second grade at St. Paul of the Cross in Jersey City. Sister Emily taught various grades at St. Paul of the Cross over the next twelve years and then taught at Our Lady of Sorrows School in South Orange for seven years. In 1958, Sister Emily was sent to St. Andrew’s School in Westwood, where she served as Superior and Principal.

In 1964, Sister Emily was assigned to Holy Trinity School in Hackensack, beginning an association with Holy Trinity that continues fifty years later. As Vice Principal, Sister Emily taught the seventh and eighth grades. She then became Superior and Principal. In 1979, after 40 years in education, Sister Emily felt that it was time to step down as Principal and serve in a new ministry. When her Provincial asked Sister Emily what she would like to do, she answered that she would like to work with the sick and the elderly in a ministry in keeping with

her original interest in healthcare. There was a real need for such a ministry at Holy Trinity parish, and Sister Emily gladly stayed on to serve the people of Holy Trinity in a new capacity.

In her pastoral ministry, Sister Emily has been extraordinarily present to meet the needs of the people of Holy Trinity, especially the needs of the sick and the elderly. She has maintained, and continues to maintain, a pace in her ministry that would tire someone half her age. At age 93, Sister Emily still drives, and she is particularly delighted to be driving a beautiful car with only 10,000 miles on it that was given to her by a parishioner. Her current weekly schedule starts with communion calls (“down to 12 regulars”) to the homebound on Monday that often continue into Tuesday. Every Wednesday, Sister Emily goes to a Jewish nursing home in Teaneck to meet with and bring communion to the Catholic residents. She says, “It’s one of the most delightful of my visits because these people are just so dear.” The week continues with regular visits to several other nursing homes in Hackensack, Paramus, Englewood, and surrounding communities. Sister Emily also faithfully visits parishioners who are patients in the various hospitals in the Hackensack area.

An important part of Sister Emily’s ministry is planning funerals and ministering to grieving families. She goes to the funeral homes and tries to attend every funeral mass at Holy Trinity. She is an invaluable presence and comfort to the families, many of whom she has known and loved for years and years. One of the Sisters who lives with Sister Emily at Holy Trinity Convent jokingly complained that at a recent funeral, “The whole line was held up because everyone had to stop and kiss Sister Emily!”

Sister Emily is an integral part of every facet of parish life. She serves on the Parish Council and is member of the parish staff. She has been in charge of the lectors and Eucharistic ministers. Although she recently turned over leadership of the parish food pantry, she remains an active member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, dispersing food from the food pantry two Saturdays a month. She is a fixture at the parish’s annual carnival and enjoys serving on the Carnival Committee. She’s on the Spiritual Life Committee, working closely with the Spanish speaking parishioners. Sister Emily observes, “I’m into everything in the parish, and we’re a very active parish. I don’t have much time to be lazy or to waste. But I don’t complain. I’m happier being busy!”

As much as Sister Emily’s tireless service is valued and appreciated by the people of Holy Trinity, the people of Holy Trinity most treasure Sister Emily for her caring, loving, and faith-filled presence. The Pastor of Holy Trinity, Fr. Paul Prevosto, wrote a moving tribute to Sister Emily in the parish bulletin three years ago on the occasion of her 90th birthday. A portion of that tribute is excerpted below:

For those who have known her for the more than four decades that she has served the Lord at Holy Trinity, I am sure you can testify to her love of the Sisters of Charity and of the People of Holy Trinity. And she can do this without tiring because she does it with purpose, this is, to love the Lord our God with all her being. Sister Emily is a beacon of light in the darkness.

Sister Emily thanks God for all that He has given her, and in particular, the good health to be able to continue to serve in active ministry. She wants to keep going as long as she can. “I have been very happy and blest in my community life. My work is nothing unusual. It’s very simple, just the work of a Sister of Charity, which I love.”

The people of Holy Trinity and the many other people whose lives have been touched by Sister Emily might argue that Sister Emily’s work is indeed far from usual, and that the simple work of a Sister of Charity is truly an outpouring of boundless love. They would join Fr. Prevosto, who concluded his tribute to Sister Emily:

Thank you, Sister, for being there for all of us and may the Good Lord bless you with many years of health so that you may continue your mission of bringing His love to all you encounter.