

Centennial Conversations

~ interview by Wendy Edwards

Meet Diana Sedenquist



Diana Sedenquist lights up and tears up almost simultaneously when she talks about her mother, Margaret. Both reactions are understandable when you learn that Diana and Margaret were truly best friends (Margaret passed in February, 2021, at the age of 94). She was a trailblazer, entrepreneur, humanitarian and healer. All Saints' past Rector, Ed Bacon, said Margaret "could recruit by attraction anyone for her visions of progress and evolution." And a parishioner who knew Margaret very well lovingly named her "She Who Would Not be Denied."

Margaret's leadership and influence extended well beyond the All Saints campus, but here she was perhaps best known for being the woman who, in the 1970s, began keeping track of gender-oriented words in the sermons and liturgy. During her first recording period, 100 gender-oriented words were used: 97 were male oriented and the three female terms used were mother, daughter and wife. Week after week she placed her color-coded marked-up liturgy in Rector George Regas's mailbox, and eventually they started meeting to discuss the issue. That led to changes in our liturgies that put All Saints in the forefront of the inclusive language movement.

Margaret's childhood in Wyoming included challenges of all kinds for her parents and five siblings as they worked to cultivate an undeveloped homestead into a productive ranch. She sold a cow to attend college at the University of Wyoming, and when she graduated, she'd already been offered a job as a psychologist at G.E.'s headquarters in Schenectady, New York. When I talked with Diana about what it must have been like to have such a strong woman for a mother, she expressed nothing but gratitude and admiration for the way Margaret used her intellect and endless energy for projects outside the home and to be a nurturing and encouraging Mom.

I asked Diana to tell me about the impact growing up at All Saints has had on her, and she took to heart the invitation to revisit some memories and reflect deeply on that connection. Her words convey it best:

"My parents, Margaret and Charlie Sedenquist, joined All Saints shortly after moving to California in 1962. I was six months old. Apparently, from very early on, I was a singer and a performer. In my mother's Christmas letter dated December 5, 1963, she wrote, "Diana, our golden-haired keg of dynamite, sings so melodiously while going about her multitudinous misdeeds of mischief that we can't help but believe that all is right with the world." Lucky for all of us, All Saints gave me the opportunity to develop my craft when I joined the children's choir. I have such fond memories of working with the children's choir director at that time, Sarah Hubbard. She was a skilled and gentle leader. When I was five years old, in the All Saints Christmas pageant, I sang my first solo on stage. Seated in a simple manger erected on the chancel, with Joseph standing by my side, I held baby Jesus in my arms and sang:

*"Joseph dearest, Joseph mine,
help me cradle the child divine.
God reward thee and all that's thine,
In paradise, so prays the mother Mary."*

"Later, as a teenager, I was a member of the bell choir at All Saints (which was quite fun) and I served as an acolyte. I went on to sing with several choirs in high school and college. At Stanford University, I sang with both the Stanford Chorale and the well-loved women's acapella group, Counterpoint. Counterpoint performed locally around town and in various locations around the country. We also recorded a couple of albums. Music continues to be an essential and joyful part of my life. Importantly, the close friendships that I formed while making music at All Saints and elsewhere sustain me to this day.

"Historically, All Saints has a mission to provide nourishment to its parishioners on many levels – spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. Of course, smart, strong, effective leadership is essential in keeping this multidimensional mission alive. My mother and I loved and appreciated George Regas. He was a brilliant, talented, thoughtful, and inspirational leader. He studied a lot, read widely, and devoted many hours of research and contemplation to each sermon. He also was an exceptionally warm and loving person.

"Years later, when I returned to Los Angeles after living in New York City, I attended a service at All Saints and heard for the first time Gary Hall preach from the pulpit. What a complete delight! Learned, professorial (in a good way), witty, and wise, Gary spoke to my mind and heart in a way that was meaningful, helpful, and true. I was an English major at Stanford and a writer by trade, so Gary's beautifully crafted sermons – weaving together spiritual concepts, religious scripture, and the pressing issues of our day – made me happy to be home.

"When the wonderfully gifted, innovative, courageous, and exuberant Ed Bacon took the helm, All Saints was in very good hands for many years to come. Like George, Ed is a lifelong learner, always seeking new ideas and deeper wisdom. My mother and Ed had a close and supportive friendship. And, in 2013, my friendship with Ed deepened when my fiancé Jack and I were preparing to marry at All Saints. We met with Ed for our premarital counseling sessions, which were pure joy. We grew close to Ed during this time and he was helpful in

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working with us to craft a very beautiful – and unique - wedding ceremony that merged both Episcopal traditions and Jewish traditions. Ed and Rabbi Alan Lachtman were co-officiants at our marriage ceremony. Although Ed and Hope moved to Alabama a while back, we remain close, and Jack and I will be forever grateful for the beautiful reflection that Ed wrote for my mother's memorial service on June 11, 2022.

“For all of my life, I admired my mother's steadfast commitment to the All Saints community. Margaret was a born leader and she brought her skills, passion, and fire to her work at All Saints. She was a champion for inclusive liturgical language that reflected women as well as men; she was an advocate for women leaders throughout the church and throughout the nation; she served on the vestry; she successfully led stewardship during a pivotal time; and, in the later years of her life, she served as a lay healer during Sunday services. Margaret's dedication to All Saints was rooted in love and she believed strongly in the healing influence that All Saints can have on its parishioners and the world around us.”

Question 1: What's one thing you're the most grateful for about All Saints Church?

“My mother and I were proud to be part of a community that strives to nurture our personal spiritual lives and to nurture and sustain other communities beyond All Saints both near and far.”

Question 2: Tell us a story of a favorite memory of your years at All Saints.

“Back in 1973, I remember clearly when Union Station Homeless Services was founded by Alice Callaghan and a group of devoted All Saints parishioners who were determined to help individuals and families rebuild their lives. It was an extremely meaningful moment for all of us at All Saints and, of course, Union Station remains a vital institution today.”

Question 3: What is your greatest hope for All Saints as we move into this next century here at 132 N. Euclid?

“May All Saints Episcopal Church Pasadena continue to share its core messages – rooted in rigorous thought – of inclusive love, compassion, cooperation, and social justice for many generations to come.”
