

# Especially for women

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## The climax of a spiritual journey

By Alice Cox

A spiritual journey, which began on the plains of Nebraska during the Great Depression of the 1930s, will culminate on Sept. 23 in Centerville when Loree Elliott, a Craigville resident, is ordained into the Christian ministry. During the service, she also will be installed as chaplain of Hospice of Cape Cod. The event may be the first time an ordination in the United Church of Christ and an installation of a Hospice chaplain have come together.

One of six children, Loree Elliott grew up in the small town of Juniata, Neb. in a family where the church was an important part of their lives. "Throughout my childhood, I heard the Biblical story at home from my parents, at Sunday school and church, in vacation Bible school, youth meetings, and conferences," says Mrs. Elliott, who has lived on Cape Cod since 1980 with her husband, Dr. Willis Elliott, a retired seminary professor, and son Mark.

"When I was ten, I had a beautiful experience of the power of God's love. I was overwhelmed with an awareness that God loved me," says Mrs. Elliott.

"As a teenager, I promised God that I would be a missionary. Exactly what this meant for me to do was not clear, but I was certain I would not marry. My role model was Anna Buzzell, a Nebraska missionary to Japan, whose photograph hung on our sanctuary's wall."

Her spiritual journey continued when she entered Ottawa University in Kansas in 1942, majoring in religion and philosophy. During the summer of 1945, she spent eight weeks in Kansas churches as a member of a gospel team with three other students.

During her junior year, a young minister, Willis Elliott, became a professor at the college and her "director and friend," reflects Mrs. Elliott, seated on the deck of her lovely post and beam home in Craigville. A romance blossomed and the two were married in September 1945 in Gibbon, Neb.

When Willis accepted a position as a teacher of Biblical languages at Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia, the couple moved there. She continued her pursuit of a college degree, studying at Eastern College in Philadelphia, from which she graduated in 1946.

With the birth of her first son, Willis Edwin III, motherhood became her main focus. A second son, Stephen John, died at birth. "God's abiding presence and the assurance of his love, along with a caring family and friends, sustained and pulled me through this trauma," Mrs. Elliott says. A third son, Peter Mark, was born in 1951. The family later would be enlarged by the marriage of "Bill" (Willis Edwin III) to the Rev. Linda Mines and the births of the Elliott's grandchildren, Matthew, 8 and Emma, 5.

"During the decade of the 1950s, I found myself in the parsonage and among the people of the Community Church in Morton, Ill., where Willis was pastor. They were a loving people, growing in spiritual maturity and numbers in a time when everything was coming up roses for American churches.

"I struggled with self-definition, amid so many roles—the pastor's wife, a young mother, a member of the church and many organizations, and a participant in church and community action.



LOREE ELLIOTT

Alice Cox photo

"My richest spiritual growth came from a weekly disciplined prayer breakfast group of six couples, clergy and laity of three different denominations."

From 1960 to 1962, Dr. Elliott worked in the division of evangelism of the United Church of Christ, which had its offices in Cleveland, Ohio. He was responsible for the continuing education of clergy, a task which required frequent travel across the country.

"I discovered strength in a new independence. When after two years we were moved from Cleveland to the New York office, I became deeper involved in prayer groups and congregational worship at the First Congregational Church in Chappaqua, N. Y. For one year, I was director of Christian education for our church school of 600.

"In New York, I helped organize an interfaith breakfast devotional group called Breakfast for the Hungry Hearted, which met on Saturdays. At the same time I served as president of Church Women United of Northern Westchester County," says Mrs. Elliott.

During the 1970s, she studied at New York Theological Seminary where her husband served as a professor from 1969 to 1980. She graduated in 1979 with a certificate in pastoral counseling from the Institute of Religion and Health.

"While completing my seminary degree, I had the further deepening experience of caring for my mother, who had a major stroke while living with us. Though I had some assistance, the primary responsibility was mine. Working with my mother and watching family and friends as they came to visit her set my future direction. While others were uncomfortable in the presence of a dying person, I found that I was comfortable," she explains.

In 1978, the Elliots came to Craigville to visit their friends, Dorothy and Gabriel Fackre. When Mrs. Fackre told them about property which was for sale, the Elliots decided to purchase one of the lots. Because of the experience with her mother, the physical labor of building their house, for which they were the contractors, became their "therapy."

In the fall of 1981, Mrs. Elliott attended a meeting of Cape Cod Community Council, which consists of all the social service agen-

cies on Cape Cod. She sat across from a woman who was on the board of directors of Hospice of Cape Cod. She expressed an interest in working with Hospice, an organization dedicated to helping people with a limited life expectancy to live comfortably in their homes and to have the best quality of life.

Beginning first as a Hospice volunteer, she moved on to "wearing three hats"—director of volunteers, coordinator of the bereavement program, and responsibility for pastoral care.

"Since becoming part of Hospice, I found myself concentrating increasingly on pastoral care. By September 1988, it became clear to me that God was calling me to this widening and deepening ministry...Hospice everywhere seeks to care for the whole person—to integrate spiritual care with psychological, sociological, and medical knowledge and

skills—and to do so on an ecumenical basis," she says.

To prepare for ordination, she met with the committee on ministry of the Barnstable Association of the United Church of Christ to seek "in-care status." All of her credentials were certified by this group.

On Aug. 26, she met with an ecclesiastical council in Centerville, consisting of the clergy and delegates of the United Church of Christ denomination on Cape Cod. After hearing the statement of her theology and spiritual journey, the council voted to ordain Mrs. Elliott at a special service set for Sept. 23 at 3 p.m. at South Congregational Church in Centerville.

Participants in this service will include friends and family members who have been part of her spiritual journey.

With the ancient ritual of the laying on of hands by all the clergy present, Loree Elliott will become an ordained minister. And with her installation as chaplain of Hospice of Cape Cod, a spiritual journey, which began more than a half century ago in a tiny Midwestern church, will be climaxed.