

## Interview with a lifetime treasurer: Elaine McElroy

The longest standing Canadian Seventh-Day Adventist Church has had one of the longest serving treasurers. Elaine McElroy has been its faithful treasurer for 6 decades without interruption, between 1959 and 2019. This interview was held at her residence on January 28, 2020.

**Lucian Stefanescu:** Sister McElroy, it is such an honor to speak with you. 60 years of uninterrupted service may be even a World record. How does thinking of all this service make you feel?

**Elaine McElroy:** They wanted to put me up for another year (chuckles), but my footing to get to the bank and that is not the greatest, so I said it is time to hang up the shingle. Well, it does not mean anything special. It has gone by, I never even thought about it, except lately when I found that it was harder for me to go out. So I said to myself, before falling down and breaking an arm or leg, lay low (smiles). Even though I loved every minute of it, doing all kinds of interesting things, I understood it was time for me to step down. But it does not seem like 60 years. It is just, I do not know, just part of my life, I guess. When I started, we were in the Ontario Quebec Conference and the pastor at that time was Glenn Davis and he and his wife were being transferred to Ontario. They were leaving and his wife had been doing the treasury work. And the next thing I know I got a call: "You have been chosen to do treasury work." "What on earth is that all about?" But I soon learned. That is how it began in 1959.

We moved down on a Tuesday and Thursday I got the phone call. We were very few in number at that point, probably 2 or 3 families of us going, but sometimes other families joined us.

**LS:** How come treasury became your main ministry? Have you been involved with other departments as well?

**EM:** I was the Sabbath School Superintendent for several years, deaconess for a while. I also took on, I don't know what you would call it, but when people were missing, I would give them a call: "We missed you. Is there anything we could do to help?"

**LS:** For your fellow church members, you were the treasurer. But Elaine McElroy must have been much more than that. Could you share with us a little bit about your life, career and family?

**EM:** Well, we were on the farm, and I had four children, and so, when there is farm work to do, you drop everything and work on the farm. I also worked with Bombardier and I also worked for the Conference office for 2 or 3 years in the 1980's. It was kind of hard because I was living in St-Anne-de-la-Rochelle and I was going back and forth. At one point I did have a car that took me there, sometimes it didn't get back (laughing). There was always something going on. I do not know if it was the driver or the car, there seemed to be a problem there. (*smiling*). But I did work for the Conference. It was Pr. Staples who hired me. And then it was somebody from Ontario who came down to audit me. Every time he would leave me a list of things to see done before he would be back the next time. And I always had his wishes. Give me numbers and if there is something that doesn't work out, why doesn't it work out? I am that kind of a person.



I was the last one hired in the department I worked at Bombardier and when they did a downsizing, I was obviously the first one out. But within two years I was hired back without affecting my seniority. I was working in Valcourt, 9 miles from where I live. So once they sent me to Sherbrooke because there was a North West Company that was buying Ski-doo's, and they were not registering them, and they needed to be registered. So they came with these boxes and they gave them to me to work on them telling me that that was work for five months. I finished in two months. So, then I ended back to Valcourt again and I got hired in at the shipping unit where I spent until my retirement, which came with a good package deal.

In between it all, a big part of my life was just as it usually happens on a farm: get up early in the morning, come down and do chores... My husband was sometimes down east, sometimes in Ontario, so after the morning chores, I would have to rush back in, get kids ready to go to school. It was the same when they got back at night, but I was sure that I was finished by then and that I could get supper ready. After dinner, we would go together and do chores. So family got it in between there somewhere. I have for children, two boys and two girls.

In my spare time, I paint (she showed me a group of nice paintings hanging on the walls of her living room. They all depicted beautiful landscapes). All this are the result of an hour and a half one evening each week. Actually I was chosen to give one to the Quebec Minister of Seniors when she visited this place (picture provided).



In 2007-2008 my husband started having Parkinson. This is why we moved together to this place. His condition got worse and worse until he passed away in 2018. Towards the end, it was not easy.

**LS:** Could you tell us about your encounter with Christ?

**EM:** It was through my husband, he was an Adventist. As a kid, I used to see his family walking by, going up to the church, and at the time I do not know how old I was, but I remember saying: "There goes the Macaroni's" (*smiling*). And then the next thing I knew, we started going out, I started going to church. When I was doing grade 11, we were doing the studies in Daniel with the different kingdoms. And I said: "If that history is in the Bible, there is something *right* here." So, I got baptized and ever since I have been a member of the South Stukely Church.

I had my rough moments. I had a brain tumor, and I did not know what to expect and what not. Of course, a country girl did not know too much about that, so I went through Pr. Wayne Martin whose wife was working at the Jewish General and she got me an appointment with a surgeon who did the operation. As I said, when we talk about a brain tumor, you get kind of scary.

**LS:** But, thank God, here you are!

**EM:** I probably missed a couple of weeks there, but other than that, I was holding down the bench. I was always at church.

**LS:** Many pastors have served the church during all this time. They came and went, but the treasurer was the same throughout the years. Do you have anything to say about the collaboration between pastors and lay people in God's work? How important is it.

**EM:** It is, indeed very important. And it went very well from my perspective. Back when I started there were not a lot of Board meetings, unless something came up.

**LS:** No cell phones, no email.

**EM:** Come on, this is modern technology.

**LS:** So how did you communicate?

**EM:** Phone. I had a good collaboration with all pastors. I remember one in particular, Don Leatherman. We had a fund for a church school and some people put money in it. Pr. Leatherman said: "Why don't we put that into the revolving fund?" After that, we said we cannot use the money for other projects because it was given for a specific project, but we can use the interest. I also remember Tom Leblanc. When I was first working in Montreal, Tom and Rose were renting property that belonged to the Conference, and I also stayed there in a small apartment, so we were neighbors for a while.

**LS:** One of the challenges of being an officer and a board member is the time involved, which is taken from the family. Could you tell us how you managed that along the years? Do you have any useful tips from your experience to share with others?

**EM:** If there was something scheduled for a certain time, I would go there. Everybody knows at home there is a board meeting, we would be there. My husband has been a Board member as well, so many times we would go together.

**LS:** What about the kids?

**EM:** Grandpa and grandma would take care of them. Anyways, no family member every complained about my church duties.

**LS:** Your ministry started when you were fairly young. And treasury is such an important responsibility. Do you remember if it felt like a big burden at the beginning? How about later as you got more experience?

**EM:** No, it didn't. Since I worked at the Conference office, too, I got a taste of a little more each time. So it never felt like a burden.

**LS:** There are studies that show that volunteer work benefits people making them happier and healthier. Has this been a reality in your experience?

**EM:** Sure. You know, even now, I am still volunteering here. I gave up my treasury work, but I kept the secretarial work that I do for the users' committee. They did ask me to do Communion Bread, and, as a deaconess, I said I will take care of that, so that is a contribution I can still make.

**LS:** 60 years of Treasury work means that a huge amount of tithes and offerings passed through your hands, surely difficult to count. How does a treasurer see the importance of money in God's work?

**EM:** It is very important. It is essential for our mission. But I must say that the South Stukely church has always been very budget conscious, which is good from a treasurer's perspective. I told the person that will replace me: last year in September, October, I got this envelope in the offering: 1400 tithes, so much for love offering, but no name on it. What am I going to do with this? Well, it is tithes, it is love offering, but I couldn't put any name, so I just put unknown. Only the person will have no tax receipt.

**LS:** What improvements have you seen from a treasurer's perspective over the last six decades? Also, what positive changes could still be made?

**EM:** When I got involved with the donation accounting, I got to know this inside out. Whenever I had problems, I called Jean Renaud and asked him to help me when something was not right. Now, they have the new Churchpal software and Jean started downloading it into my computer. But I told him that this time he will have to deal with somebody else.

Once we passed from paper to computer, it was much better. I also remembered that in the beginning, people got their salary weekly so I would get 4 envelopes every month from each family. Then they said: "let us put those envelopes together", so instead I got one envelope from each family per month, and that made everything much easier.

**LS:** Now online giving has also become available, and some people are using it regularly, which can have a positive impact on treasurers' work.

**EM:** I have never worked with that.

**LS:** Maybe because it is a small church and it is fairly new, but I am sure its time will come. In your opinion, what makes a good treasurer?

**EM:** Dedication. (*short pause*). And, of course, one has to like to work with numbers.

**LS:** It is so true. Dedication is valid for all. If you have dedication, you can do anything, elder, deacon, and so on. So let me say thank you for your dedication! What was your greatest challenge as a treasurer and how were you able to overcome it?

**EM:** Maybe the 2016 church renovation. I was afraid that we were not going to have the funds to finish the project. Many times I wondered: “Where is all that money going to come from?” But God was faithful and He provided. Maybe the prejudices that I encountered from one of the pastors I worked with because I was a woman. But that is in the past now. Other times, I would open an envelope and the amount was short. I would recount and if there were any discrepancy between the envelope and the amount in it, I would call the person. Only once. And that was it. Other than that, there were no actual challenges and I enjoyed my time.

**LS:** What was your greatest blessing and joy as a treasurer?

**EM:** I always felt blessed when everything worked out, when numbers added up.

**LS:** The mission of the SDA Church is to prepare people for Jesus’s soon coming. For some, treasury has a more technical connotation. As a treasurer, how did you experience involvement in the mission of the church?

**EM:** I was just part of the group, I guess. As a Board member, I was part of all decisions, of course. I never felt that treasury was in any way separated from the main mission of the church.

**LS:** If you were to tell something to the youth of the church today, what would that message be?

**EM:** What was good for me, may not be good for them (*pause*). I do not know. But I think I would say: You’ve got to love your Lord and do whatever He wants you to do. I guess that’s what I would say.

**LS:** What is your favorite Bible text?

**EM:** Ps. 62:1-2: “Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.”



**LS:** Thank you so much for this interview. Also, on behalf of the Quebec Conference, I would like to express our deepest appreciation for your service. I would like to present you with a gift from the Quebec Conference, a plaque that you can keep as a souvenir of your lifetime service and a gift card. May God bless you and keep you until you will encounter the One you have served with such dedication and love!

**EM:** Thank you!