

Wrapping up before the whistle blows



Submitted

Pastor Bill Mayton preaches at Main Street United Methodist Church in Waynesboro in the early 2000s.

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Gina Farthing For The News Virginian

Others who started in ministry at the same time as Bill Mayton have long since retired. Some have stepped back, but not this 79-year-old. When he next steps into the pulpit, it will be to deliver his 4,151 and 4,152 sermons at Main Street United Methodist Church, where he serves as pastor emeritus.

"There used to be a church next to a mill. They used to say, 'Say what you need to say before the whistle blows.' That's the reason for the sermons," Mayton said. He has a message for the community but declined to share even a hint of what he has to say.

"I just want to make sure I share it before the whistle blows," he emphasized.

The Man

Mayton was born Mar. 6, 1936 in Farmville, Va., and a life ministering to others was part of his plans but not what one might think.

"I was trained as an accountant and I thought I wanted to be a salesman," Mayton said. "I didn't decide to be a pastor, God did."

He graduated from Virginia Tech with his Bachelor of Science degree, June 8, 1958, six days after marrying Kay B. Connelly on June 2.

He received his Bachelor of Divinity in 1960, then completed his Master of Divinity in 1972, both from the Emory University Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Ga.

Mayton and his legal secretary wife had two children. There's Michel Q., previously a scallop salesman, but now pastor of Macedonia United Methodist church in White Post, Va.; and Kay B. Callis, a receiving manager for Bass Pro Shop in Hampton, Va.

"My dad was usually with us in our activities as [children]," said Michel Mayton via email to The News Virginian. "He was general manager of our York county youth football league and came to all of the games and most practices."

Pastors often have control over their schedules, the younger Mayton said, except when emergencies arise, such as the year the family tried to take a vacation to Pennsylvania Amish country. Every time they attempted to leave, Bill Mayton would have to tend someone's dying.

"Christmas Eve was always a work day," Michel said. "But we were free to go away until school started back after New Year's."

The Ministry

Michel said that his father is an old-school preacher. No computers or electronic devices for him. He still writes his sermons with a Flair pen and a yellow legal pad.

"Sermons are started with the lectionary scripture [a 3-year cycle of scriptures]. He prayerfully researches it, though he may have preached the particular periscope 27 or so times."

Afterward, his father decides what the congregation needs to hear from the text or what the Lord would have him share.

"Pop will add in some illustrations to make the bible story relevant and the sermon interesting," Michel said.

Pastor Bill said that he, "helps people discern what God wants people to do and how to do it."

His father is funny, said Michel, and Bill tells stories like one of his mentors, Bishop Kenneth Goodson. "[They] can take a two-minute occurrence and keep you involved in hearing it 3-times that long," Michel said.

The elder pastor is a lover of people and respects all people, as individuals. Before the times of political correctness, Bill never allowed his family to speak of "people of color" in any other way than fully respectful.

"Pop treated everyone with respect and dignity whether they were a truck driver, gas pump jockey or the person that owned the company," said Michel.

He likes to sing, hates the phone and will talk in person any time night or day as long as there is coffee and something to say.

A sign in his office say something similar to, "I was not hired by men but called by God," Michel remembered.

"Pop would go to the hospital, someone's home or wherever he was needed whenever he was needed," he said.

Wanda Kornicke of Waynesboro is someone who came to know Bill Mayton on more than one instance and in varying cases.

Kornicke is a retired elementary school teacher. She and Bill met around 20 years ago, when he came to town.

"I was intimidated by him until I got to know him," she said.

She and Bill worked together as caregivers, visiting people once a week during a 10-year period in the Stephen Care Group. They sang together in choir.

It was during that time that Kornicke was diagnosed with Chiari, an endophalitic type of disease.'

"He went way beyond the call of duty," Kornicke said.

Pastor Bill stayed with her before, during and after her brain surgery and afterward read to her Winona classrooms before lunch. Eventually he began to work with kids who needed additional assistance one-on-one.

"He's a good man and has done lots of wonderful things," Kornicke continued. "Most of the time he is a happy man as he preaches."

"He worked in my class for three years and then one for the school," she said, "Even when his own health began to deteriorate."

The Future

"I'm no longer judgmental about anything," Bill said. "Looking back, it's been interesting to see where my training really was: a group of four little country churches. I thought I knew it all."

During his tenure as pastor in the United Methodist tradition, his mission became more administrative. But through his administration, he came to learn that he was called to preach not administrate.

"I never thought I was the important one in what I've done," Pastor Bill said. "I've been here to help people answer, 'What is God calling me to do?' and 'What are you doing to prepare and make your lifestyle amenable?'"

Bill's health these days is poor in his opinion. "I can't walk anymore and I have to sit on a stool." He also is battling diabetes, arthritis and neuropathy.

Besides mentoring prospective ministers, Bill said, "I'll probably continue to teach Sunday school." It's something he does every other month for the seniors in the congregation.

He takes the job very seriously.

"You have to have your stuff in order," he said. "They wouldn't let you not prepare and God wouldn't be satisfied."

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