



William H. Harter

August 29, 2020

The Reverend Dr. William Hall Harter, 83, was called to his eternal resting place on Saturday, August 29, 2020. The son of the late Eugene and Doris Hall Harter, he was born September 11, 1936 in Titusville, Pennsylvania. He was a beloved brother, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend to all.

In 1942, the Harter family moved from Titusville, Pennsylvania, to Clarence, New York. It was here that William, known to many as Willie or Bill, would immerse himself in a world of books, comics, radio shows and time spent outdoors on their small farm caring for animals. He also looked after his younger siblings whom he loved dearly as long as he lived -Suzanne, Eugene Jr., and Beth. Clarence was a small, rural community in western New York, and in this place he was surrounded by a loving family and close friends. His early life was shaped by post-depression era realities and the World War II home front efforts of his parents who tended a Victory Garden and collected scrap metal for use in the War. As a youngster, he survived Polio and was deeply inspired by the service and bravery of GI's returning from victory.

From a very young age, Bill gravitated toward reading and sought to understand the world around him. His scholarly pursuits began in the Clarence Central Schools. His formative high school years were spent at Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts where he graduated top of his class in 1954. He matriculated to Williams College in Williamstown,

Massachusetts, where in 1958 he graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in History.

Upon graduation from Williams, Bill was accepted to Harvard Medical School, but during that summer, he withdrew his acceptance and enrolled into the Harvard School of Education where he earned a Master of Arts in Education in 1959. The following year, Bill taught high school Social Studies and English in Brookline, Massachusetts. Additionally, Bill served in the U.S. Army Armor Corps Reserve from 1959 to 1965.

While at Harvard and teaching in Brookline, Bill responded in faith to the call of ministry and enrolled in Union Theological Seminary in New York City. During the spring of 1963, he earned a Bachelor of Divinity, summa cum laude, with an emphasis on Biblical Studies.

While at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he met and fell in love with Linda Karen Blagg, also a Union Seminary student. They married on August 15, 1964, at the James Memorial Chapel at Union. Shortly after their wedding, Bill and Linda moved to Israel where they lived in Jerusalem from 1965 to 1966 as he continued his studies at Hebrew University, Hebrew Union College, the Swedish Theological Institute, and the American Schools of Oriental Research (Albright Institute). His scholarly pursuits would also take them to Goetting University in West Germany. During this time, his and Linda's love for the Holy Land -the people, the land, and the state of Israel - grew tremendously. They would develop lasting friendships that deepened over the years through continued visits for guided study tours, religious reconciliation journeys, and pilgrimages.

After returning to New York from Israel, Bill worked as a tutor and adjunct lecturer in the New Testament at Union Theological Seminary. Soon, he and Linda received and answered a call to ministry in the Catskill Mountains of

New York. They served the congregations of the Margaretville and New Kingston United Presbyterian Churches. Alongside each other, they ministered to these congregations and the surrounding communities by consoling the grief stricken, praying with the sick and downtrodden, and teaching with love and deep conviction the tenets of Christianity. The aim was always to draw people towards faith in God.

In addition to pastoral work, their ministry in the rural Catskills included extensive efforts around social issues such as poverty, addiction, educational challenges, and cultural and historical preservation. Bill was the lead-coordinator of an annual arts and music festival known as the “New Kingston Valley Community Whoop-De-Doo”, which brought over 4000 people into the New Kingston Valley on the last weekend of August. In conjunction with this festival and supported by the community, the church published four volumes on local history and culture within a 10-year period.

While in Margaretville, Bill was appointed by Governor Nelson Rockefeller to the New York State Advisory Committee on Mental Health which worked directly with the New York State Mental Health Commissioner. Bill represented the concerns of rural New York in regards to mental health issues. Additionally, Bill helped establish Alcoholics Anonymous groups and alcohol and drug rehabilitation networks in Delaware County, NY.

During their ministry in the Catskills, Bill took leave from pastoral duties in 1976 to campaign as a candidate for New York State’s 27th Congressional District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Though unsuccessful against the incumbent, Bill succeeded in capturing the hearts and minds of his supporters with his campaign slogan, “Bill Harter, He Hears You”.

The truth behind this slogan was evidenced by a continued commitment to the

ministry that would soon take him from the Catskills of New York to the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania. In the fall of 1977, Bill began his ministry at the Presbyterian Church of Falling Spring in Chambersburg, PA. Shortly thereafter, Linda, who was also an ordained Presbyterian Minister, would join him on staff as Minister of Pastoral Care continuing their calling as a clergy couple. They devoted their lives to serving the Falling Spring congregation and the Chambersburg community. Bill and Linda raised their five children in the church's manse, and living on the Falling Spring campus was a constant blessing for Bill and his family.

While working full time at Falling Spring, Bill completed his Masters in Philosophy in New Testament from Union Theological Seminary. In 1982, he earned his Ph.D. in New Testament from Union Theological Seminary. His doctoral studies had an emphasis on Jewish and Christian origins, which culminated with a thesis that focused on the Battle of Masada in 73-74 A.D.

Bill's efforts in the struggle to eradicate religious anti-Semitism and political anti-Zionism grew in scope and reach. He was involved with several organizations including the National Middle East Task Force, the National Council of Churches Committee on Christian Jewish Relations (founding member), World Council of Churches Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (North American Consultant), National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel (founding member and Secretary/Treasurer), the Christian Study Group on Judaism and the Jewish People (founding member and past chair), Presbyterians Concerned for Middle East Peace, and the America-Israel Friendship League (Board of Directors). He spent time authoring many articles and reviews dealing with Jewish-Christian relations, anti-Semitism and Middle Eastern affairs.

One of his greatest joys in life was organizing and facilitating journeys to the Holy Land where he shared with others his extraordinary love for the people

and state of Israel. In over 60 trips to the Middle East, including Israel, Egypt, Jordan, along with Turkey, Greece and Italy, Bill strived to connect himself and others to the lands of the Old and New Testament. What drove this lifelong pursuit was a foundational calling and passion to share the love, grace, mercy and forgiveness of God. Bill was a peacemaker.

While working both globally and nationally to initiate and perpetuate peace, justice, and reconciliation, Bill brought this same enthusiasm to organizing, leading, and continuing efforts to improve the Chambersburg community. These local initiatives sought to provide hope and improve conditions for those suffering from homelessness, mental illness, and addiction. Along with the help of countless others, these efforts formed the basis of several thriving organizations that continue to this day.

He was a founding member of the United Churches of the Chambersburg Area (UCCA) alongside Rabbi Chernoff, of blessed memory. Through his participation in the Community Worship Committee for the UCCA, he chaired the Committee for the Annual Holocaust Memorial Service, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Service and the 9-11 Memorial Service. He was a founding member of Building Our Pride In Chambersburg (BOPIC), which supports children in the community through health and education initiatives. As Board President of the non-profit Historic Letterkenny Chapel and Franklin County Veterans and 9-11 Memorial Park, he worked tirelessly alongside the late Senator Terry Punt, County Commissioners, and many others to restore the Letterkenny Chapel, originally built by Italian prisoners of war. He was also a member of the Chambersburg Rotary Club and a basketball coach for King Street Elementary School.

In his capacity as Pastor at Falling Spring, he was a member of the Carlisle Presbytery, and he served as chair for the Task Force on the Role of the Church Educator, the Committee on Ministry, and the Carlisle Presbytery

Camp and Conference Committee.

Bill and Linda's ministry at Falling Spring Presbyterian Church continued up to Linda's sudden and untimely death on January 21, 2006. Bill continued as Pastor until his retirement in 2009 when he was honored as Pastor Emeritus.

Bill loved pastoral ministry, and he cherished his time at the Presbyterian Church of Falling Spring. He walked alongside his congregants and members of the community in both joyous and difficult times. As a preacher, his sermons were creative, challenging, and Christ-centered. He was a humble and dedicated servant of God. He leaves a rich legacy of what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Bill and Linda have been blessed with a loving family of five children, ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He is survived by daughter Sonia and husband Joel; daughter Tamar and her children Joshua, Isaac and great-granddaughter, Emilina, Levi, Joseph, Caleb, and Adriana; son John and his children Ella and Christian along with great-granddaughter, Emma, daughter of the late Selby Harter; son Lee and wife Jodie and their son William; son Nathanael and his wife Suzanne.

Bill will be buried next to Linda in the graveyard at the Presbyterian Church of Falling Spring. A private interment ceremony will be held in the coming weeks, and a Memorial Service is being planned for later this fall and will provide both in-person and virtual participation. Instead of flowers, the family graciously requests that donations be made in his honor to the Presbyterian Church of Falling Spring (memo line: Harter Memorial Fund) or the Chambersburg Area School District Foundation (memo line: Harter Memorial Scholarship Fund) where support is given annually to students who are interested in the ministry.

Condolences and memories are gladly accepted online at Sellers Funeral Home.

Tribute Wall

KS

“ My deeply felt condolences to the entire Harter family. The Harter and Reilly families were close friends back in the 1950's and I have many fond memories of out times together. You made me feel like the Hater pool was my pool. I was always welcome, even if no Harter's were home. dear God, while I am sure you have already welcomed Billy to your side, please bless his remaining Earthly family, Amen. Douglas C. Reilly

Kris Sellers - November 14, 2020 at 08:38 AM

JD

“ My mother and father thought the world of Dr Harter and Linda. My mother always enjoyed Linda's flower garden. Linda was very special to my mother. Dr Harter was a very good friend to my father. Both of my parents enjoyed their times going to Israel under Dr Harters knowledge. He was a good friend to all. To the family of Dr Harter thank you for sharing of a great couple with the community

Jim Dromeshauser - September 11, 2020 at 07:18 PM

MS

“ May these trees blossom like the love you have shared with us for your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Michael Spencer - September 05, 2020 at 08:01 PM

TJ

“ Dear Family of Reverend Harter ,Our sincerest heartfelt sympathy to you all. Reverend Harter was truly a blessing to all who were fortunate to have known him. Praying for God to comfort you through this difficult time.Sincerely,Les &Tina Jiles

Tina Jiles - September 04, 2020 at 11:59 AM

AW

“ The last time I (Barbara) saw Rev. Harter he was in a rehab facility where my mother was also healing. Knowing him and Linda from earlier years, I re-introduced myself. I thanked him for his years of ministry and we prayed. Yes, he was wearing one of his Hawaiian shirts. Each time I visited my mother and would see Rev. Harter, we would exchange a few words and "God bless" each other. He and Linda were highly respected in my eyes and our community. Our prayers are with the Harter family and others who loved him dearly. A joyous reunion is promised to those who follow Jesus Christ into Eternity. Sincerely In Christ,Revs. Alan and Barbara Witter

Alan and Barbara Witter - September 04, 2020 at 10:42 AM

HS

“ For my Uncle Bill, reunited with Linda, and for my cousins. God Bless you, and I love you, love jess

Heartfelt Sympathies - September 04, 2020 at 12:48 AM

RM

“ Thanks to the invitation and support of Pastor Bill Harter, I was blessed to participate in two Pilgrimages to Israel, one with Bill in 2017 and one without him in 2019. Our common love of Israel and efforts to work for peace in the Middle East immediately formed a strong bond between us. I regret that I only knew him for five years, but I rejoice that I will one day be with him again in paradise. Shalom Aleichem, Brother Bill!

Ronald Martin-Minnich - September 03, 2020 at 04:39 PM

SF

“ Bill Harter was a model for what a Presbyterian minister should be. Both very pastoral/caring AND an accomplished scholar with emphasis on the Old Testament, he touched me deeply in my own ministry and many others within Carlisle Presbytery. He was always ready for a conversation and time with me. The untimely death of his beloved Linda (also an amazing pastor) was a loss many of us felt deeply. I am certain the God of the Hebrews (YHWH) and the Lord Jesus were both there to welcome him to his Heavenly Home. "Well done, though good and faithful servant....." Steven Fleming, friend and colleague.

Steven R Fleming - September 03, 2020 at 04:14 PM

MV

“ Hey John, so sorry to hear that your dad passed away. I only met him briefly the one time I picked you up for our road trip to see Kern at Syracuse, but he obviously left behind an amazing legacy. Peace my friend as you grieve and walk this road. Will be thinking and praying for you and your family.

Mark Valentine - September 03, 2020 at 03:11 PM

RW

“ Bill was a wonderful human being. He married Emily and I in 1978, and though we moved to New England, I spoke with Bill on several occasions when we visited Chambersburg. Both his faith and intellect were deep and abiding. I also appreciated his sense of humor, which was of a variety that sneaked up on you. Rest easy, Bill.--Rob Weir

Rob Weir - September 03, 2020 at 03:02 PM

PG

“ Always, I will be grateful for Bill Harter's life, especially for the ways in which his mind and his heart brought me closer to God. Dr. Harter was our professor. A superb storyteller, he engaged us with anecdotes from the Bible or from his trips to the Holy Land, and he did so not just in sermons but also in meetings and in casual conversation. Bill was a consummate teacher. Bill's compassion is legendary, even for such as me. I have not been particularly faithful in my church attendance. And yet: Every single time Dr. Harter saw me, his face would light up and convey the unmistakable message that I mattered to him, that he was genuinely happy I was there. I think all of us received that same message. Bill Harter will be mourned by many souls across this community and around the world. We love him because he loved Jesus, he loved his Church, and he loved us.

Peter Gibaud - September 03, 2020 at 02:34 PM

JB

“ I have known Bill for forty years. He did such an excellent ceremony at my son's wedding. He was such a kind and caring person and he was so knowledgeable. Just hearing him speak was so soothing to your soul. I am going to miss you Bill but I know you are now in heaven with your true love Linda. My condolences and prayers are with your family!

Joe Bowman - September 03, 2020 at 11:53 AM

PC

“ In our lifetime, we are sometimes privileged to know very special people who touch us in positive and lasting ways. The Rev. Dr. Bill Harter was such a person. His humble and unassuming ways compelled us, and many others, to follow him on a brief journey of friendship. We are truly blessed to have known and closely worked with him. He helped guide preservation and development of the Historic Letterkenny Chapel and Franklin County Veterans and 9/11 Memorial Park. This is a long name for an organization, uniquely crafted by Rev. Harter, to capture the main community elements of this Franklin County place. His shared vision was to ensure a place of reflection and tribute to all who serve today, and who lost their lives on that fateful day in American history. One only has to read the pages of his legacy of accomplishments to this community, and to the world, to realize that we were, for a short time, in the presence of a \u201cman of God\u201d who lived for The Lord, his Family, and Mankind. May God\u2019s Grace and loving embrace carry him to Heaven on the wings of Angels. Paul and Priscilla Cullinane

Paul and Priscilla Cullinane - September 03, 2020 at 11:16 AM

DF

“ We are deeply honored that Rev Dr Harter was our family\u2019s faith leader. He was so accomplished, yet so very humble. We will greatly miss his presence on Earth\u2014the finest Messenger of God. Our deepest sympathies to his family ...

Devona & Douglas Peck Family - September 03, 2020 at 09:39 AM

HS

“ With deepest sympathy

Heartfelt Sympathies Store - September 02, 2020 at 09:31 AM

MG

“ *Bill was a man of great faith and deep convictions. I cherish memories of time together at General Assembly gatherings, talks with Bill and Linda in the Manse kitchen, about my potential call to ministry, but mostly the grace and shalom which he always exhibited. He touched more lives than we can ever know and will be missed by so many! Well done good and faithful child of G_d.*

Matthew Glasgow - September 02, 2020 at 09:30 AM

Jl

“ *I share many memories with Bill. We worked together in different areas and I thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to know him and work with him. You have my deepest sympathy. May God bless you richly. Pastor John Ile, retired*

John Ile - September 02, 2020 at 08:15 AM