

In Memoriam: the Rev. Douglas Walker Gray

Doug Gray died early Monday morning on July 31, 2017. He was 95 years old. For weeks, Doug and Pattie had received the tender and steadfast support of their children, Portia, Roger and Lee. As the scripture speaks of the death of the patriarchs, he was “old and full of years”. This is scripture’s way of speaking of a full life utterly devoted to God.

Doug was ordained in 1945 as a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, where he met and married his wife, Pattie, a student in the school of Christian Education. Doug began his ministry as Navy Chaplain stationed in Pearl Harbor. He left the Navy and accepted a three-point call in the Adirondacks.

Aided by the G.I. Bill, Doug returned to Princeton and received a Masters on Theology. In 1952 Doug accepted a call in the Albany Presbytery to the Mariaville Presbyterian Church. In 1958 he began his ministry at the Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church. Under Doug’s leadership the church grew to 400 members, building a Christian Education wing while leading the congregation to engage in the social ferment of the 1960’s. It is this seamless fabric of pastoral and prophetic ministry that was a hallmark of Doug’s ministry. He remains the longest serving pastor in Hamilton Union’s 220 year history.

In 1972, Doug was called to serve a church in Fulton, NY, returning to Albany Presbytery in 1977 to lead a project designed to revitalize rural churches. From there he accepted a call in Oneonta from which he retired in 1987.

In 2006, Doug and Pattie returned to the capital region. It did not take long for them to be persuaded to return to Hamilton Union. Doug’s first official act on his return was to wear the chicken suit on an 85 degree summer day for the Brooks Barbeque. He soon helped organize an adult Bible study in which he actively participated until a progressive hearing loss caused him to stop. Despite his loss of hearing Doug and Pattie were regulars at worship except when they were at the summer camp at Paul Smiths.

Doug’s Christian ministry in no way captures the breadth and depth his life. A devoted husband and loving father and committed friend, Doug adored God’s creation, was a legendary maker of maple syrup, a self-taught sailor and handyman. He was as intellectually vital as he was physically vigorous. It was his gift which brought Walter Brueggemann to the Capital Region under the auspices of the CRTG.

Despite his years, Doug never lost the fire in his belly. His continual challenge was always, “What is the church going to do about this?”

On the last day of his life when I came to visit he sent out an apology for not getting out of bed. On entering his room his first words to me were, “How was church?”

During my service at Hamilton Union Doug has been a mentor, a support and a wonderful gadfly. His love for Jesus and his commitment to God’s justice and his tender pastoral concern will continue to guide Christ’s mission in this church.

Stewart Pattison