

PURPOSEFUL SERVICE

By. A. James Fuller & Rebecca Blair '80



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L. Wayne Smith '37

The Rev. L. Wayne Smith always has known his life's purpose, living deliberately with an innate integrity. While he discerned his call to ministry in childhood, what matters more to Smith is how he and others choose to live out their vocations. Not one to pull punches, he will fix his gaze on his partner in conversation, explaining sincerely and directly what he believes. Too much time, he asserts, is wasted on discussing trivialities, such as sports and the popular interest of the moment, rather than "ordinary conversation" about deeper human matters—what he refers to as "talking with a purpose in mind." This direct attention to life's essentials embodies for Smith the significance of education for service, a concept he has practiced in his career in ministry. As he puts it today, "if you want to do good for people in the world, you

ought to get the best and broadest education you can. Then face people, eyeball to eyeball, directly with it.” Yet, the core of this process is the quality of the relationships we make with others. Smith advises us to “make all of your life as personal as you can, so that, as a friend, you can talk to them about what you know and what you believe.”

Smith’s deeply-held convictions have informed his life from the beginning. Even in childhood, he “always wanted to be a pastor,” due to the influence of his father, who had served as a missionary to the Philippines and also was superintendent of the Indiana Conference of the United Brethren Church. He believes his vocational call was primarily “a matter of family living.” Indeed, Wayne followed in his father’s footsteps, preaching his first sermon at age sixteen. His father also taught at Indiana Central College for a couple of years and that connection led Wayne to the school. He graduated in 1937 and cherishes fond memories of a number of the faculty members who influenced him, including Dr. Sybil Weaver in English and Dr. John Cummins in Philosophy. Other influences through Indiana Central included David Manley, a native of Sierra Leone, who Smith recalls as the first black man he had ever met. Manley, who went on to serve as a missionary in his homeland in Africa, lived with the Smith family during his time at the college.

Typical for many Indiana Central students, life’s personal and vocational purposes seemed to merge for Smith. He forged several close friendships with African-American students on campus, friendships that would influence Smith to work actively in the Civil Rights movement later in his career. He enjoyed another close relationship with



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Jim Eaton, who served as his Big Brother on Campus. The Big Brother program was a mentoring system that helped first-year students adjust to the campus climate and successfully negotiate college life. Smith also established a romantic connection with fellow student, Allene Davis, with whom he fell in love shortly after meeting her on campus, a young woman who would soon become his wife. The more formalized, rigorous moral purposes were instilled by President Good in the form of numerous lectures on morality. Smith recalls thinking the strict standards established by Good to be too overbearing, believing that the discipline was often arbitrarily and unfairly practiced in a laudable effort to prepare students to lead Christian lives. Yet, despite the rigor of the college environment, Smith held true to his vocational purpose, pursuing a minor in religion.

After graduation, Wayne Smith followed a familiar path for many young preachers-to-be who attended Indiana Central: he enrolled in Bonebrake Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, completing his studies in three years to graduate in 1940. As was the custom for seminary students during this era, Smith accumulated on the job experience by serving as a student pastor while in seminary. His first call after seminary came close to home. His father, still superintendent of the Indiana Conference, assigned him to build a new church in Bedford, Indiana. This task required him to serve two nearby rural churches for one year.

In the midst of building the congregation as well as the bricks and mortar, the Second World War began, making it challenging to find building materials. Smith was forced to go out on the road to find the necessary supplies. There was also the looming matter of Smith's service in the war. Neither a pacifist nor a militarist, he viewed military service as a simple matter of patriotic duty. He expected to be a chaplain and filled out all of the necessary paperwork to serve, but Bishop Dennis said the church needed Smith as badly as did the military, so he did not continue with that plan. Instead, he counseled military families who faced loneliness and economic hardship while the soldiers were overseas. He says that he soon learned to "be with the people, not give them much advice or judgment." Whenever he could, Wayne spoke "a word of hope, encouragement, support." Already, as a young pastor, he was learning the power of presence in ministry. Often, all the people needed was someone to be there.

In 1945, Smith moved to a Methodist Church in Flint, Michigan to serve as Associate Pastor. His wife's uncle was the senior pastor, and Smith was responsible for ministering to the youth and young adults. This larger church offered many vocational opportunities for a young pastor with the added bonus that he was removed from the shadow of his father's influence hanging over his career. But the shift was also a matter of theology. Although he did not consider himself theologically liberal, the prevailing fundamentalism in certain quarters of the United Brethren Church disturbed Smith. He also was faced with a clear, but difficult choice. If he stayed within the United Brethren denomination, he knew that he probably would be assigned next to the largest congregation in the state, a prestigious

position for a young man not yet thirty. But that church was conservative enough that the presence of a recent seminary graduate could present many problems. Moreover, for Smith, one of the basic problems with the United Brethren Church in Indiana was a decided anti-intellectualism at the level of local congregations. He believed the conference had a prejudice against seminaries and educated clergy, a perspective made worse by the rise of fundamentalism, which stressed emotional experience and legalistic standards over thoughtful tolerance. So, he moved to the Methodist Church, hoping to find opportunities to grow theologically in a somewhat more liberal direction.

His connection with the Methodists exposed him to a wider world. In the Detroit Conference, he met many of the great preachers of the day. He also came to know politicians, businessmen, labor leaders, and activists. Later, he moved to Tawas, a resort area in Northern Michigan, where he was responsible for two churches (they refused to merge) and assumed the challenges of ministry to many temporary congregants who had come to the area for recreational purposes only. After that appointment, he traveled to Royal Oak, where he served as Minister of Evangelism and helped set up the Two By Two Evangelism program that was then very popular. It sent out couples to extend the gospel and work for church outreach. He also served as Minister of Christian Education, which required him to oversee the Youth Director and the Sunday School program. Still later in his tenure at Royal Oak, Wayne became Minister of Finance. Despite his changes of location and ministerial roles, Smith's vocational purpose remained uppermost in his ministry. Not only did his personal touch in ministry extend to his congregants, but also to younger preachers whom he mentored, a role he considered to be crucial within the church and one which he fulfilled with careful intention.



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Feeling the impetus to take on a larger ministry, Smith moved from Royal Oak to the Henderson Memorial Church, where he served as the sole pastor of a 700-member church. He worked through some significant issues with this congregation, which had loved a pacifist pastor for twenty years and now faced a different kind of leadership. The growing church membership during Smith's tenure required the congregation to build a new, larger building. Yet, not content to contain the church's ministry inside the new church walls, Smith, keenly aware of the church's civic responsibility, actively worked at the grassroots level for the Civil Rights Movement. Smith observes that most of the early work for civil rights addressed local



issues, such as integration and zoning laws, interracial youth meetings, and the education of church workers in matters of racial equality. While in the Detroit area to participate in these kinds of civil rights activities, Smith heard the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lecture on civil rights issues, an event that reinforced and sustained Smith's own ministerial purpose. He remembers those as "good years," but also as years filled with lots of pressure and tension. Wayne moved from Henderson Memorial to St. Andrews, his last Methodist congregation, which was facing severe problems of finances combined with inactive members.

In 1961, at forty-five years of age, Smith, along with his wife, were now the parents of four daughters. Faced with the mounting financial pressures created by this growing family, the Smiths moved to Rensselaer, Indiana, where Rev. Smith as-

sumed the pastorate at the First Presbyterian Church, a pulpit held by his brother some years before. Although the move meant that Smith was giving up all his pension rights in the Methodist Church, it offered the kind of opportunities for service and for longer tenure, which seemed inviting.

In vocational terms, the move also came with challenges and joys. The congregation he served was experiencing a growth period for seasoned congregational leadership, a situation Smith had not encountered before. Yet, he also enjoyed the freedom of the Presbyterian call system, which allowed congregations in consultation with the presbytery to call a pastor instead of the appointments being directed by a bishop. He stayed at the Rensselaer church for eighteen years, again leading the church to become actively involved in community and social justice issues. Smith himself modeled civic engagement, working closely with Planned Parenthood and even running for mayor. He ran unopposed, but withdrew from the cam-

paign at the invitation of his Presbytery to accept a call in another Presbyterian church. There, he succeeded a minister who had been recently dismissed by that Presbytery, after a pastoral scandal and the resulting divisions that threatened the church's life. The congregation required a time of sustained emotional healing while also facing foreclosure on a \$100,000 loan in danger of default. Again, Smith brought his intentional ministerial purpose to bear, nurturing his congregants personally and directly while working to raise the needed funds.

In 1981, after twenty years in the Presbyterian Church, Wayne Smith honorably retired from the ministry. He and Allene eventually moved to the Indianapolis area to be near the University of Indianapolis, since so many of their friends were in the area and connected with the school. He recalls the valuable life lessons the seeds of which were sown during his time at Indiana Central. Over the years, he has found that true ministry emerges from a genuine "friendship between pastor and people," the kind of essential relationships which Smith experienced during his college years. He also learned to "preach the Gospel in non-judgmental ways" since this approach allowed his congregants to be able to "see God there." To L. Wayne Smith, the best way to spread the Gospel of Christ has been through purposeful personal relationships. For it is in those close relationships that one has the opportunity to minister with a sense of presence, just by being there. And those relationships also allow one to move the conversation to deeper issues, to stand up for one's convictions and, "eyeball to eyeball," to render purposeful service.

INDEX OF PHOTOGRAPHS: IDENTIFICATIONS & PERMISSIONS

1. Photo of Rev. Smith at wedding of grandson Matthew Fish to Margaret (July 4, 2004) – personal photograph, used with permission of Rev. L. Wayne Smith.
2. Photo of Rev. Smith and his wife Allene with their daughter, the Rev. H. Ann Williams at First Presbyterian Church, Rensselear, IN (2004) – personal photograph used with permission of L. Wayne Smith.
3. Rev. Smith and his wife Allene with their greatgrandson named after Smith's father Amzi A. D. Smith, superintendent of the Indiana Conference of the United Brethren in Christ Church. Amzi's mother is the Rev. Mindy Meirs-Zorn, personal photograph used with permission of Rev. L. Wayne Smith.