

WE

Rev. Oren R. Williams

*[The original document ends with a paragraph titled **OUR APOLOGIES** which states, "Due to the fact that WE wanted this to be OUR STORY, we did not accept some offers that were made to EDIT what I have written." While the version that follows has been minimally edited, THE CHRONICLE agrees that this should be the Williams' own story. Consequently, we have not shortened the manuscript and have maintained as much as possible of the original language and style. Appropriate explanatory notes and "updates" appear in the footnotes and with the pictures, both which have been added by the editor. As the words of WE are those of an honest man of an bygone era, some contemporary readers may question and/or feel uncomfortable with certain particular portions of the text. The intent of THE CHRONICLE and, we assume, Rev. Williams is to present an accurate account of rural Methodist ministry in Central Pennsylvania during the early and middle twentieth century. In that spirit, we invite the reader to enjoy WE.]*

The Preface

WE is the true story of a United Methodist Minister and his wife who, by the help and grace of God, served forty-seven years in the rural ministry. The word "WE" is used as the title because it includes God, the minister and his wife, and others.

It is the story of the forty-seven years of Christian ministry of the Rev. Oren R. Williams and his wife Helen C. Williams, along with their son James Robert and their daughter Eleanor Louise, who were given a unique work to accomplish in God's kingdom in fifteen charges and a total of sixty churches within the bounds of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Forced by family financial circumstances to delay his education until after the age of twenty-one, the minister was unable to continue his formal training beyond four years at Dickinson Seminary.¹ This was followed by four years in the Conference Course of Study. The lack of more education did not keep the minister from doing what he felt God wanted him and his family to do, for he believed that it was not always how much one came to know that was important, but the way one used what he knew. Yet, the rules and regulations of the Annual Conference made it impossible for him to attain to what some may call great heights.

While many of his better educated friends were serving what were looked upon as the better churches, he was being

appointed to some very large and out-lying so-called rural charges. The minister and his dedicated wife believed that God had appointed them to serve the wonderful people found in our rural churches. They had to travel over many difficult dirt roads. The traveling expenses were very high and, due to the inability of the rural folks to pay enough to care for all the expenses, the salary was low. Due to no fault of their own, the minister and his family were always in debt.

Many minister friends as well as some laymen recognized the unique work done by Oren R. and Helen C. Williams. As they neared retirement, they were constantly being urged to write a book giving their experiences. The ten chapters here present those experiences, the result of forty-seven years in the rural field of the Christian ministry. Forty-four of the years were in churches of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, and three years of ministry were in the East Bridgewater Community Church located about four miles from Sunset View.² May God, the main member of "WE," bless you in the reading of this material.

[1973] Oren R. Williams, retired
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Chapter One

WE Meet: The Girl in the Beautiful Dress

The story of WE began on April 7, 1899, when the third son and the seventh child was born to James L. and Johannah A. Williams at Scotia,³ an iron ore mining town west of State College, PA. Three years and three months and ten days later, or on July 17, 1902, a daughter and the first child of the family was born to Harry S. and Mabel E. Hoy of Houserville, a small community east of State College. Though born and raised not ten miles from each other, the boy and the girl were not to meet until some years later, after both had finished their grade school education and after the girl had graduated from Pleasant Gap High School. From a class numbering thirty-three in the freshman year, she was the only one to graduate in the class of 1920. She was the president, the vice president, the secretary, the treasurer, the one with the highest grade, the one with the lowest grade -- yes, she was EVERYTHING in the class. Early in their lives, the boy became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Scotia and the girl had a conversion experience at a revival service at the Methodist Episcopal Church at Pleasant Gap. The latter occurred in the year 1916, under the pastorate and the leadership of the Rev. Marshall Piper -- a veteran of the cross, but a very active and dedicated minister.

In the spring of 1919, or immediately following the end of the First World War, the parents and family of the boy moved to Pleasant Gap -- the town where the girl's parents had recently built a house and were living. The girl was now the oldest of eight children. Two married sisters of the boy also lived in the same town, near to the girl and her parents. One evening, soon after moving to the town, the boy was visiting the younger of the two married sisters (and the one who lived nearer to the home of the girl). He noticed an attractive young lady caring for some younger children along the side of a nearby house, and he noted that she was wearing a beautiful pink and white plaid or checked dress, a dress that he was never to forget. No other dress would ever be so beautiful, and no other girl so attractive. While the boy immediately fell in love with the dress, it would be some months before he would have an occasion to really meet and fall in love with the girl who was wearing the dress.

Even though the boy had seemingly been spurned by girl friends of his former home town, it was apparent that the hand and will of God was being manifested in all that was to follow. If this were not true, then all that was to follow and the WE of whom I am writing would never have become a reality. In the days that were to follow, and in spite of many things, the boy was to meet the girl of the beautiful dress, was to fall in love with her, and was to live a very

productive life in the work of the Christian ministry to which they both felt that God had called them.

After we moved to Pleasant Gap, my father was a clerk in the store of the husband of one of my sisters. I was unemployed at the time, for it was the spring after the First World War and jobs were very scarce. My father did not like being a clerk and, since he was able to secure a job elsewhere, he suggested that I be hired in his place. My brother-in-law was not quite certain about trusting me as his clerk, for he felt that I would want to be going somewhere each evening just at the time he needed me most. In this he was mistaken, as I would go to the store early each morning and stay until late evening. I was later told that he counted me as the best clerk that he ever had. I was pleased at that.

It was while I was a clerk in the store that I noted that the girl with the beautiful dress would come to the store for groceries. At first we merely spoke to each other, but it was not long until we became better acquainted. Both of us had received an invitation to a party at a nearby farmhouse, and I was greatly surprised when the girl with the beautiful dress asked me if I was going to the party. When I told her that I was, my answer seemed to please her. This appeared to be the real beginning of our interest in each other. This interest has never diminished, for it has grown more and more through the years.

At the party that evening, I was in the house with some youth while the girl with the beautiful dress was on the front porch with some others. She and a couple of others were sitting on the porch swing when it became overloaded and broke down. The girl of the beautiful dress had hurt her ankle in the mishap. When the party was over, I noticed that she limped and seemed to be in pain. I asked her if I could assist her to her home and she quickly consented. From that point on I believe that she and I became the WE of this story.

It was some days later that her mother sent her to my mother for what was known as bread "starter." We felt that WE already had that "starter," for we kept on seeing each other.

Our love for each other began to grow, but our interest in each other was opposed by both her parents and mine. It seems that they felt that neither one of us was good enough for the other. Just why we kept on loving each other only God knew. We believe that He had a purpose in it all, for the opposition served to bring us closer together. I had already decided to be a minister of the Gospel, and my father many times told me that the girl of the beautiful dress -- although he did not call her that -- would never make a minister's wife. The years since have shown just how wrong he was, for she has been ONE OF THE BEST.

WE began to go places together, and especially to church worship services. Since the Methodists and Lutherans alternated their services, we had both a morning and an

evening service of worship. We would go to our own church in the morning, and then both of us would attend the evening service that was held in the Methodist or Lutheran church. It was her great interest in the work of the church that attracted me to her and helped her in the days to come to be a real minister's wife.

If the weather would permit, we would take a long walk and talk over the many things that were of interest to both of us. It would be a long time, however, before she would invite me in to the house with her. Thus our first two years were spent taking walks or standing under an apple tree while we waited for better days to come. There was a very important question in our minds: what were we going to do when winter came? My decision to become a student at Dickinson Seminary in Williamsport, to begin my preparation for the Christian ministry, was our answer. With my going to school, the first chapter of WE came to a close.

Chapter Two

WE Have a Long and Informal Engagement

Since I had always been poor, I started my four year course of preparation for the Christian ministry very limited in what I could do. There was one thing that I soon found out I could not do, and that was to go home very often. And thus we were together very little, especially during that first year, but God helped us in our loneliness. Because I had to spend most of my time in school, most of our years before marriage were spent apart from each other. It seemed that WE had all kinds of problems, but God helped us to face them and to solve most of them. By this time God, in and through His Son Jesus Christ, had become a real part of WE.

During my first year at Dickinson Seminary we wrote many letters to each other. It was in and through them that we really began to express our love for each other. It seemed that both of us were able to write what we were unable to say to each other. It is my feeling that our letters helped to prepare us for the very few times that we could be together. I well remember the very first time that I was able to go home. Soon after arriving, I went to the store where I had worked and where we really began to notice each other. When I called my sweetheart on the telephone, the tone of her voice revealed that she was happy to have me home. When I asked if we could be together that evening, she answered, "I really hope so." Then I asked her another question, "Where shall we meet?" She surprised me by saying that I was to come to her home and that we could be together there. Her answer made me very happy, as the days had already become rather cold. Although we began to make plans for the days before us, we never spoke to one another about being engaged. We always assumed that God wanted us to be together and that in His time He would reveal His plans to us. WE ever tried to love and to live by His will. To us there was no other way.

Our letters were our only means of communication while I was attending school, and I would anxiously await for each of hers to arrive. I generally received them at the end of the day, and their contents would help me as I settled down to prepare the lessons for the next day. I never kept the letters, for I did not want to share their contents with others. God already knew their contents, and many times I prayed to Him about our love for each other. We could never doubt His interest, for we felt that it was His will that WE had met and had now come to love each other very much.

The girl in the beautiful dress had given me a picture of herself. She had worn another beautiful dress for this picture. I kept this picture of her on my dresser, and I do not have to tell you that I looked at it often. One day another ministerial student visited me in my room and, seeing the picture, asked me who it was. When I told him, he said,

"O, she is a pan-face." For some reason, I never cared as much for him afterward. My girl in any dress has always been beautiful to me. Deep within her there was a beauty of character that could never be duplicated. All through the years she has kept that beauty, a type of beauty that only God is able to give.

Only once did I receive a letter from her that seemed to be the end of all our dreams. I had been home for a Christmas vacation, and I received the letter soon after my return to the school. My youngest sister and another girl had told her that I had been going out with other girls during the vacation. It was an out and out lie, but my intended needed to be certain that it was. I wrote and told her the truth, and she believed me. This was just another time that my relatives tried to separate us, but they were not successful. If their actions did anything, they brought us even closer together. With God directing our lives, WE could not help but succeed.

My first year at Dickinson Seminary came to an end, and so did my finances. I owed the school for some books. Even though I had waited on tables and had worked off campus evenings and Saturdays, I still needed more money if I was to continue my education. And so I had to make a very important decision: should I continue going to school?

There were few funds available in those days to help such a one as I. My sweetheart was working at the time at the J.H. & C.K. Eagle silk mill in Bellefonte, and we felt that I should try to secure a job there. I was hired and worked the night shift --from 6:30 pm to 6:00 am, with half an hour off for lunch. I worked hard and was rewarded with a number of pay increases. While I was able to save some money that year, I lost something that I have never been able to regain -- good vision. The lighting and colors of the silk had hurt my eyesight.

That year WE were able to meet each other during the week ends. When I went home from work on Saturday morning, I did not have to return until Monday evening. By this time we were just beginning to be accepted by each other's family, although some opposition did continue. We were both being told by our parents and by others that we were never meant for each other. While we listened to the criticism, we never answered back. During that year we came to know each other, and that knowledge plus the grace of God made our love stronger. We always felt that God was on our side, and He was always included in the WE.

We were able to go to Sunday School picnics, reunions, parties, other social events, as well as church worship services. If anyone in the church had looked closely at us two young people, they would have noted that we were holding hands -- even during the preaching of the sermon. Knowing that I was trying to save every penny in order to return to

school, my girl of the beautiful dress would pay for our bus fare and for the tickets when, once in a great while, we attended the movies. We can well remember the Emerick buses and how uncomfortable they were. We did not seem to mind the discomfort, however, for the rough riding only brought us a little closer together.

During the warm evenings we would sit on the porch swing at her home. She would sit on one end of the swing and I on the other. One evening she had occasion to go into the house, and I decided it was time to make a move. I sat a little more to the center of the swing and placed my right arm along the top of the back of the swing. When she returned, I let my arm drop down to her shoulders. Since she did not object, we began to sit a little bit closer. She has remained close to me ever since.

I was able to return to Dickinson Seminary for a second year, and then a third, and finally the fourth. During one of the summers I returned to the silk mill. The other summer I worked at nearby Rockview Penitentiary digging ditches. Many evenings after I had returned from work and eaten the evening meal, my girl of the beautiful dress would rub an ointment of some kind on my blistered hands. For a time I worked inside the stockade and near to the so-called death-house -- as near to the electric chair as I ever wish to be. My future father-in-law was a master carpenter, and he had helped to plan many of the main buildings.

Whether I was at home or at school, my mind was always directed toward the future. I had always wanted to be a minister of the Gospel. It seems that I was following directly in the steps of my father, who also had the dream of the ministry. Due to the fact that my grandfather died of an accident when my father was only four years of age, however, and that he lived with another family, his dream never came true. He often told me how he prayed that if he ever had any sons, one of them would become a minister of the Gospel. I was the seventh of ten children. Since the number seven is the number of fulfillment, it seemed that God wanted me to be the answer to my father's prayers. WE always felt that God had called both of us to a work in His kingdom in and through the Methodist Church.

It was during my fourth year at Dickinson Seminary that we began to make some definite plans for our marriage. I had never asked her to marry me, and thus I had never made a formal proposal. Our six years together made us realize this was just the natural thing to do. We had always tried to do the right as God revealed it to us, and we always tried to keep ourselves morally clean. By the grace of God we were successful in this. We wanted our marriage to be not the end of a six year period of informal engagement, but the real beginning of the years that God would give us in the work to which He had called us.

We set Friday, April 2, 1925, as the date for our marriage. Yet when the day came, it seemed that neither of us was certain. Our informal engagement had been a time of deep abiding love and of great happiness, but we were not certain just what our marriage would involve. Here again God's hand was directing us. As I walked down the steps of the "Angel Factory"⁴ to go to the railway station, I had to push myself along. My intended, who was on the train that was bringing her nearer and nearer to me, later told me that she too wished that somehow the train would never arrive. It did arrive, and we went to the court house for our license and then to the church. What it was that made us do it, just why we kept on going, only God knows.

The Rev. Alexander Scott, Minister of Williamsport's Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, united us in the bonds of holy matrimony. No other couple ever had or will have any more love at their wedding. As our best man, my good friend and fellow ministerial student Francis H. Love, was over six feet tall, I have always insisted that we had at least six feet of LOVE with us at that important occasion. Mrs. Maud Martin, a lady who had charge of the dining room at the school, was the matron of honor. We were not privileged to be together that first night, as my dear wife slept in a room in Bradley Hall while I slept in my room at the "Angel Factory."

The next morning we prepared to go to our parental homes, leaving Williamsport with the blessings of many of my school friends.

That night we stayed with my parents in their home in Bellefonte. We were financially unable to take a honeymoon then, and to this day we have never taken one. The days in which we are now living, however, have become a continuous honeymoon to us. My all too short vacation that Easter was spent visiting in both our homes. Some special events were held for us, and soon I had to return for my final weeks at Dickinson Seminary. They were to be lonely and difficult weeks, times that brought tears to my eyes and an ache to my heart. But in everything I knew that God was helping me over a very difficult path. The wonderful letters I received almost daily from my dear wife helped me in those trying days. God was still going forward with His plan for our future.

WE were to be separated for a time, a time of hard work and loneliness for each of us. Yet those weeks brought us closer, and WE became stronger. I set myself to preparing for graduation. I had a difficult time with all my studies and, lacking a high school education, thought it would be impossible for me to reach the school's standards. I was told that I had failed by a small percentage in three of my subjects. Two of the professors were very kind to me and gave me the privilege of bringing my marks up to passing. But the third one, the dean of the school, would not do so, and a fraction of a credit kept me from graduating. I felt alone,

home-sick and heart-sick. Only the presence of Jesus and my wife's letters kept me going.

It was very difficult for me to tell my dear wife that I would not be graduating. It was also difficult for me to tell my parents and others. All of them had been looking forward to that day, but now it was not to come. Only the grace of God enabled me to be and to do what I needed to be and to do.

I had made up my mind that this would never change my determination to be a minister of the Gospel. If I couldn't be one by graduating, then I would be the best one possible without graduation. The hurt that I felt at the time of graduation was helped by some words spoken to me by Dr. John W. Long, the president of the school. As we met one day in the hall, I told him how sorry I was that I could not graduate and that I felt as though I had let the school down. He said to me, "Brother Williams, there are some things that are better than graduating. You have been a credit to this school in the kind of life that you have lived here among us. This is a better school because of your being here." How could I remain sad after his kind words?

Dr. Long told me of the need for a minister in the Clearville Parish in the Altoona District, and before I left school I was appointed to our first charge. We were busy with preparations, for we were to go there as soon as I returned home from the school.

My wife had packed the few things that she had and, immediately upon returning home on Friday, June 12, 1925, I asked my brother-in-law if I could use his Ford truck to take a trunk and a box to the railroad station. They were sent to what would be our home, our first home as husband and wife. The trunk is still a part of the furniture in our home, and the box is used by our younger grandson for his toys. Both have survived the forty-eight years. They contained all our worldly goods, but we were too happy to pay any attention to the lack of that which the world is able to give. We were to find that we would have to live and do the work to which God had called us without depending on things.



O. R. Williams

"Bill"

Bellefonte, Pa.

Gamma Epsilon Society; Secretary Y. M. C. A.
'25; Union Board '24; Student Council 3, 4.
College Preparatory.

*"The ancient saying is no heresy—
Hanging and wiving go by destiny."*

1925 Senior Picture from "The Dart", the yearbook of Dickinson Seminary

Chapter Three

WE Go To Serve Our First Charge

Early on the morning of Tuesday, June 16, 1925, just a few days after I had returned from Dickinson Seminary, WE left from my wife's parental home to travel by automobile to our first charge at Clearville, in the southern part of Bedford County. The automobile was owned by my wife's parents. Accompanying us were my wife's oldest brother, who did the driving, her youngest brother and her mother.

Not unlike Abraham, as recorded in Hebrews 11:8b, WE "went out, not knowing where" WE were to go. After traveling all morning and making some wrong turns, we finally found ourselves on the highway leading from Everett to Clearville. About a mile south of Everett the macadam ended, and the rest of our traveling was over a dirt road. Soon after coming on to the dirt highway we saw a Model T Ford truck just ahead of us. Nearing it, we noticed it carried our trunk and box. There, right before our very eyes, were all of our worldly goods on the way to our first parsonage and our first home.

A little later, when we arrived in Clearville, we were met by some of the people of the church. They immediately made us feel welcome and at home. This was to be our very first home as husband and wife. Our trunk and box soon arrived, and our first task was to get our beds ready for the night. Mr. and Mrs. James Grubb invited us to their home for the evening meal. A wonderful example of country hospitality, the meal revealed what WE could expect in the days to come. That evening my wife's youngest brother became homesick and cried for his own bed saying, "I want to doe home to sweep." They left for their home a day or so later. Now we two were alone -- yet not alone, for God was very much with us.

It was not long until I knew what a quarterly conference was all about, for district superintendent Dr. James McKendree Riley called one just a few days after our arrival. He must have known the condition of our finances, as he suggested that we be paid the salary from March 1, the beginning of the conference year. He told the people of our need of an automobile, and he advised us to make a payment on a new car.

Our salary for that first year was to be \$1000 for serving five churches.⁵ A day or so after the conference WE made plans to buy a Model T Ford roadster. My wife has often mentioned that the seat was so high that she felt like she and I were queen and king as we sat on the seat of that car.

WE were to serve a total of fifteen charges and sixty churches over forty-four years of service before our active ministry would come to an end, but no other charge would hold so many wonderful experiences and memories as did this first charge of five churches. My wife's birthday was July 17, just a month after we had arrived in Clearville. Since she had never been so far away from her parental home, it was

natural that she became homesick. When I asked what she would like for her birthday, she said, "Just take me home." In the beginning, there were just the two of us plus God in our WE, and we could come and go as we pleased. She was so happy to be back home with her brothers and sisters. After she had talked with everyone and we had been there a day or so, she turned to me and said, "Now I am ready to go home." She was never homesick after that, and from then on WE were together seeking ever to do God's will for our lives.

Even though the bonds that held us together were to grow stronger each year, the WE of whom I write was never any more evident than on that first charge. Our first big task was to hold at least two weeks of evangelistic services at each church that winter. Since the Robinsonville and Stevens Chapel churches stood in a narrow valley across a small mountain from the other three churches, we decided it would involve too much travel to go back and forth each evening. The members of those two churches invited us to stay with them, and so it was that we would pack our suitcase on Monday afternoon and not return home until Friday evening. We stayed with different families, slept in all types of beds and ate of the food that only they knew how to prepare. Living with them, we got to know them. We often slept on feather beds and on beds that were rather hard to sleep on. There were no electric currents and no bathrooms. While our bedrooms would usually contain the necessary utensils for the night, there was one home in which we could not find them as we prepared for bed -- I wish to say that it was a very long night for us and that we were happy when we could leave the bedroom the next morning.

The homes as well as the churches were heated with a "chunk" stove. The fires at the church would not be kindled until someone arrived, usually just before the time for the service to begin. We were always cold at the beginning of the service, but the church would become very warm before closing time. At the Robinsonville church this warmth had a tendency to awaken the many wasps in the building. One evening one of them found its way up my left trouser leg and, as I was preaching, it began to sting at about my knee. I brought my hand down on my knee, but this only made the wasp angrier. I knew that there was only one thing to do. I said to the congregation, "Please excuse me until I go outside and get this wasp out of my trousers." The people smiled, and some even laughed, but all of them understood.

We stayed a few times in a house that was not completed. We had plenty of covers to keep us warm while in bed, but the next morning we found snow on our bedcovers. There was no ceiling in the upstairs rooms yet, only the open roof to stare at as you lay in bed, and the snow had sifted in through cracks in the roof. At the same home we were often served well prepared meals, but due to the openness of the house the

flies could not be kept out. Our kind hostess made something with which she was able to chase the flies away from the food and from us -- she cut a newspaper into strips, fastened it to a stick, and would wave it back and forth over the table. We soon learned to take these things as a part of living with them. We not only won them to our hearts, but WE were able to win many of them to Christ and His church.

At that time, all the roads on the charge were dirt roads. In winter and spring we had to drive slowly through deep mud. We had to become familiar with the various ruts, for one would help us to get through while another would cause us to get stuck. Many times I started out on Sunday morning with the Model T in low gear and never once was able to put it into high gear. For you who may not know anything about the Model T Ford, I note that it had only two gears -- the low and the high. Our Model T was about worn out at the end of our first year, and this was on account of all that mud.

One Sunday morning when the mud was so deep on the roads, and had become frozen, that it was impossible to drive, I called a farmer and asked for the loan of a horse. He lived at least three miles from the parsonage, so I started out and met him and the horse about midway. I got on the back of the farm horse and started to go over to Robinsonville. When I got to the top of the ridge and was able to see the church in the distance, I noticed that the people were returning home. I turned the horse around, went back to the farm, returned the horse to the farmer and started walking home. It was very difficult to walk over the frozen ground and my heels became very sore. I was so sore the next day that I could neither sit nor walk. I never again asked a farmer for the loan of a horse.

During our second year at Clearville we bought a couple of pigs for them to make hogs of themselves. We also bought some chicks to raise for their meat. Since the pig pen and the chicken house were close together, the chickens would get into the pig yard. We were surprised one day to find that our pigs had come to like chicken and had eaten some of them, and so we had to do something to keep them apart. When the cold days of fall came, we made arrangements with a farmer friend to butcher our two hogs. He came to the pen and shot them for us, but we were responsible for getting them to his farm for butchering. I put them on a sled and we hauled them out of a narrow alley and up a short grade to the public road. As we started up the hill toward the farmer's house, I told my wife that the load did not seem heavy. She looked back and said, "No wonder; we have lost the hogs." Returning to the parsonage, we found them lying on the ground at the place we started up the grade to the road. Our neighbors were there and were laughing heartily at what had happened.

We could give a number of other unusual incidents that happened to us, but we hesitate to do so in words that will be

read by the public. Suffice it to say that never were a people so kind and so willing to share what they had with their minister and his wife, especially considering that the two of us were as unaccustomed to things as we were. God had sent us to the right charge, for it was here that we learned many things as WE lived and served among these wonderful people.

At the end of the year, the district superintendent came to the charge to administer Holy Communion at some of the churches. As we rode home after the services, he talked with me about the work we had done, and he was in high praise of it. We will never forget those first years of ministry and that first charge. We had learned many things that would help us in the years to come. We had some wonderful teachers, even though some may have thought of them as "hicks." While they would say "his'n" and "her'n" and other such expressions, we fully understood them and they taught us some lessons we have never forgotten. God had placed us with them that we might have a solid foundation on which to build for the years to come. No couple in the Christian ministry could have been as fortunate as WE. God, the number one member of WE, had guided us in the things to which He had called us. Now WE were ready to travel the difficult path before us, and our forty-four years in the active ministry were to be difficult, but it was to be very rewarding.

Chapter Four

WE That Were Three Become Four and Then More

Our son, James Robert Williams, at the time of the writing of these words, is the minister of the Port Matilda United Methodist Parish in the State College District of the Central Pennsylvania Conference.⁶ He was born August 4, 1926.

That was to be a never forgotten date for WE, for at the time of his birth I almost lost both mother and child. In our travels during the winter of our first year on the Clearville charge, some typhoid fever germs entered my wife's body. In March 1926, I almost lost her to this dread disease -- at least it was a dread disease then, but science has made it less than that now.

In our home on the evening of August 4, 1926, were the doctor, two women from the Clearville congregation and myself.

The two women had come because my wife had been in great distress. Just before our son was born, the doctor looked at me and said, "I may be able to save the life of your wife, but I am not certain I can save the life of the child." But God, who was the first and most important member of WE, had other plans. The child, a boy, was born; both he and my dear wife were saved for the days that were ahead. His small body had been turned before birth, and he was born feet first. We had two sets of names ready, one for a boy and one for a girl. He was immediately given the name of James Robert.

With nourishment from his mother's breast he began to grow, and from that time on he has been a very healthy child.

When we took him with us to an evening service or a meeting in a home, his mother would put his night clothes on him. On a church pew or in a bed he would quickly go to sleep and not awaken until we were ready to go home. Even then he would have to be awakened, and he would smile at everyone present. When we arrived home, he would be put in his own bed and be a good baby for the rest of the night. Through a difficult birth, God had given us a wonderful son that we have always loved and appreciated.

At the parsonage in Burnt Cabins we were often visited by black snakes. We were told that they were harmless and that we were not to fear them. One warm day we found one lying on the arm of a rocking chair on the front porch. We had a small canvass swing for our son and had fastened it to the limb of a tree in the front yard. One day my wife had placed our son in the swing and had given him a soda cracker to eat while she worked in the house. Moved to check on our son, she was horrified by what she saw. He was leaning as far forward as possible and trying to give a bite of his cracker to a black snake that had made friends with him. We have never forgotten how a child, our son, had made a friend of a snake.

He learned at an early age that his parents wanted him

to behave while he was with them in a worship service. One Sunday afternoon when he was about two years old, he wanted to have his own way during a service. He insisted on getting off the pew and crawling on the floor, under the pew and away from his mother. His mother had other ideas, and she reached down, picked him up and took him outside the church. There she proceeded to give him a sound spanking. She then brought him back to the church, placed him on the pew and sat down beside him. From that time on he never caused any real trouble. Surely this could be a lesson for modern-day parents.

During the latter part of our ministry at Burnt Cabins,⁷ on February 15, 1929, our daughter was born. We were thankful to God that there were no complications when she was born in the parsonage. My wife had been under the care of a doctor whose training had qualified him for just such a time, for after the birth of our daughter he told me privately that we should not have more children. My wife had been severely hurt during the difficult birth of our son, and the doctor felt that I might lose either her or the child or both if there were to be another birth. I believed him and, as we had a wonderful son and daughter, we were satisfied. We could never thank God enough for them. We gave to our daughter the name we had selected before the birth of our son, and she received the name Eleanor Louise. We moved again, to the Rays Hill charge,⁸ in the spring of that year.

One day while we were visiting in my wife's parental home, her mother became alarmed at the possibility that we might have a child born at each place we would serve. We assured her that she had no cause to worry. We served fifteen charges in our forty-four years of ministry, so that would have been a large family. There would have been other problems, as we served one charge for only nine months. We were very thankful to God for our two children.

Don't think that our two children were different from other children or think of them as PK's (Preacher's Kids). They learned to play together through times of differences and times of cooperation. At one place we had a sand box for them, and our son found pleasure in building things with the sand. Our daughter was then about two years of age and did not know or appreciate the things her brother was doing. She would wait for an opportunity to tear down what her brother had so carefully built up. He would then come to his mother, tell her how carefully he had built something and tearfully add, "But sissers tears them down." We would always try to understand their problems, for they were living in that period of their lives that was so important for future development.

There was one thing that they cooperated in doing, and it was of great help to their parents. If one of them would get the measles or any other of the diseases of children, we could rest assured that the other would get it also. My wife and I would cooperate in their care at such a time, as when

both of the children had the whooping cough. One night, after a very difficult day, my wife and daughter were together in bed and I was caring for our son. It seemed that all of us had come "to the end of the rope" in our strength, and I prayed to God that He would help us to have a restful night. I had hardly ended the prayer before all four of us were asleep, and we did not awaken until late the next morning. Our great Partner in WE had been mightily with us.

In the public schools there are those children whose parents do not keep them clean or otherwise care about their physical condition. In one of the grade schools where both our children were students there was a family that had a bad case of "the itch." Our son played with the boys of the family and thus became subject to the itch. It spread to many parts of his body and to all four of us. The teacher was unfair to our son; she blamed him, and not the dirty family, for spreading it in the grade school. A doctor recommended an ugly smelling ointment. Each evening my wife would take our daughter and smear the ointment on her, and I would do the same with our son. Then, after they were in bed, we would take turns smearing it on each other. You may be well assured that we were all very happy when the itch finally disappeared.

One day when the children were still rather young, it was housecleaning time and my wife and I were doing some work upstairs. We left the children in the dining room to play with some toys. Some time later, when my wife had occasion to go downstairs, what she saw made her cry out in fear. Both of the children were sitting on the floor with burned match stems all around them. When asked what had happened, our son replied, "I wighted dem and sisser bowed dem out." Both of us felt weak afterwards at the very thought of what might have happened. Matches seemed to have an attraction to our son, and so it was that a few years later we gave him the task of burning the waste paper. My wife would give him at least two matches and tell him to return the ones he did not use. From that time on we never had any more trouble with him and matches.

My wife used a particular method with the children when they attended church worship services. It worked well and brought favorable comments from many of our people. One even commented that they were the best behaved preacher's children that she had ever seen. She would have our son sit on one side of her and our daughter on the other. Only once in a great while did I have to speak to them about their behavior in church. Today our son is a minister in the United Methodist Church and our daughter is a registered nurse, one of the school nurses at Montrose High School.⁹

Very soon after our son was born, we as parents began to call each other what we wanted our son to call us. And so I would call my wife "Mother" and she would address me as "Daddy." Even today the children continue to call her Mother,

but they have shorted my name to Dad. After both of the children had married, we felt that we ought to call each other by our first names. I would call her Helen and she would call me Oren, but it was not long until we were back to using Mother and Daddy. Though we are now retired, we still use those two words -- even in public places.

Our son and his wife celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary on Sunday, March 25, 1973. Our daughter and her husband will celebrate their twenty-fifth in September of 1974. Our fiftieth will be April 2, 1975.

Chapter Five

WE Work Together Toward My Ordination

On March 17, 1926, I had to leave my wife, who was still ill with typhoid fever and expecting the birth of our first son in August, to drive our Model T roadster all the way from Clearville to the annual sessions of the Central Pennsylvania Conference being held that week at the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Berwick, PA. I was alone, and it was a long journey for me for two reasons: I was thinking of my dear wife, whom I had to leave for the week, and I was traveling over roads which I had never traveled before. I well remember that it was Bishop Edwin H. Hughes who presided at the conference sessions and Rev. D.D. Kaufman who was our host. Almost everyone there was a total stranger to me, and it was an altogether new experience for me. I was so lost as I went to the sessions, but I was soon to have many friends and to know just what to do.

I felt that I had little to add to the conference sessions, and so it was that I was tempted to leave for an afternoon. I had a minister friend whom I had met at Dickinson Seminary, and I suggested to him that we take a ride on the highway going up along the river. We traveled as far as the town of Plymouth, and there I turned into a side street to turn the auto around. While on the side street, we hit a low place or a rut in the street and broke the rear spring of the Ford. We were able to return to Berwick, but the next day I had to have a new spring put on the car. I did not have much money, and I had to use most of what I had for the spring and labor. I realized that I should have stayed at the conference sessions so that none of this would have happened.

I was so happy when the sessions came to a close and I could return to my wife and our first home.

During the months ahead I was required to study a number of books and to make reports on them. I would read the books and then prepare a penciled copy of my work. I had bought a used typewriter, and my wife would use it to type the final copy for me. Many were the days we would work long and late, for there were deadlines to meet and we did not wish to send in work after the required date. Older ministers of the conference were our instructors. Under the guidance and leadership of Rev. Gordon A. Williams, I was able to finish my work and to be ready for the next conference session. Even though I had attended Dickinson Seminary, I was never financially able to attend college. Also, I was twenty-eight years old and at an age when learning did not come easy for me. I should say that learning never came easy for me, for all of my four years at Dickinson Seminary were years of sweat and tears.

During the week of March 16, 1927, I attended my second annual conference sessions, this time at Trinity Methodist

Episcopal Church in Lock Haven, PA. I had arrived at the time and place when I could no longer be a Supply Pastor. I was asking the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church to accept me "on trial." Up to this point I had tried to show the Conference that I really wanted to be a minister and that I wanted to serve God through the churches to which I would be appointed. One day during the conference Gordon Williams told me that I had been accepted. The way would still be long and difficult, but I was determined to go forward.

The step that WE had just taken toward my ordination seemed to be a short one as we thought of the many steps that we would be taking in the four years ahead of us. WE, trusting in God, would have many difficult problems to overcome. I would not only be required to prepare sermons and to perform the other duties of the ministry, but I was also expected to be a diligent student. At the second conference session we had made plans to buy the needed books for the first year of the four year course of study. We would have to prepare immediately for the Summer School sessions held annually at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA.

Most of our lay people are not aware of the tremendous amount of time, talent, tithe and effort that a young minister must give in order to fully prepare himself for the Christian ministry. After purchasing the required books, I wondered just how and when I would be able to pay for them. At first we would casually look through each book, and I can well remember how scared I was -- some of them were on subjects I had never heard of, and they were like a foreign language to me. As a student at Dickinson Seminary I was required to study the Greek language, now I discovered, as the saying goes, "it was all Greek to me."

One year during the Summer School session our class was studying a book entitled "Theism." Even though it was a study of the beliefs in God, it was very difficult for me to read and understand. The day before we were to have an examination on the book, I wondered just how I would be able to do anything with the questions the teacher would give us the next day. But God, our Partner in WE, opened a way for me. On the evening before the examination, the members of our class met together in a room and asked each other questions. I listened, for I could not join in the discussion. After that session, I felt that I could go to class the next day and answer the questions that would be given us. I was able to pass the course because I had listened to my fellow classmates. Our registrar, the Rev. Gordon A. Williams, told us later that we were the best class that he had been permitted to work with. I could easily believe him, for the men in the class who were able to understand the course were willing to share their knowledge with such a one as I.

At the close of the second year of the conference course

of study, I was ready to be ordained a deacon. Annual Conference began March 12, 1929, less than a month after the birth of our daughter. It was held at Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church in Clearfield, PA. I, like the other members of the class, now felt fully prepared for ordination. Just a day or so before it was to take place, however, Gordon Williams came to me and said that a certain instructor had not yet sent in to him my grade for his course. "If we do not get your grade for this course," he said, "you cannot be ordained. You had better do something about it." What could I do? The instructor was not at the conference, as he had no reason to attend. When I asked some of my ministerial friends what I should do, most of them suggested calling him on the phone. At the time I was in the vestibule of the church and God, the great Partner in the WE of whom I am writing, was very near and even then bringing the answer. As I was praying, the door of the church opened and there right before me was the instructor. When I hurried to him and repeated what had been told me, he assured me that he would take care of the matter immediately. This he did. Years later when I had occasion to talk to Gordon Williams about the incident, he told me that he took the instructor's word for it and that to that day the instructor had not sent in to him my grade for the course.

On Sunday afternoon of that week I, along with the other members of our class, was ordained a deacon. As I was kneeling at the altar of the church, I felt so very much alone. At that time one's relatives did not attend, as they did a few years later, and my dear wife could not be with me.

As I was feeling so alone, I sensed that someone had come to the altar and was kneeling beside me. It was the Rev. William M. Young, or "Bill" to those who had come to know him. He had many times visited in my parents' home and had married a girl that was distantly related to me. I deeply appreciated his presence there with me, and I told him of my appreciation. Bishop William Fraser McDowell ordained us, and the Rev. Edgar R. Heckman was the conference host.

The ordination service at that time was somewhat different from today's. Our entire class wore their regular suits; today each one to be ordained must wear a ministerial robe, as must the bishop, district superintendents and others taking a part. As the conference secretary read our names, we went forward and knelt at the altar of the church; today the candidates are called one by one to a small altar behind which the bishop is standing. [Even though we were together at the altar, we took the vows individually.] I was alone at the altar until a brother minister came and knelt beside me; today's candidate may have wife, family and some relatives present for his ordination. We did not always have an older minister for a sponsor, but this seems to be very much a part of the service today.

Immediately after ordination we started the third year

of the course. As we went from one year to another, the books were costlier and even more difficult for some of us to understand. With hard work and the loving cooperation of my wife and children, however, I was able to do the required work. Having become more acquainted with the work of a minister on a charge, we were becoming more involved in pastoral duties and community activities. If we had not already known that a minister's work is never done, we would have learned it even in those early years. Those who downgrade and degrade the ministry by saying that a pastor has nothing to do need to take a day off from their regular work and follow their minister around as he works with people. But more of that in a later chapter.

As previously noted, older ministers of the conference were our instructors. Some were kind and understanding, while others could be unkind and would not help us with the course.

In one of the courses I was to tell some things about my call to the ministry. It was a part of the written work. Proceeding to do it in the best way that I knew how, I told how I was afflicted with inflammatory rheumatism during the early years of my life, how I had been subject to many diseases, and that twice my parents thought that I had died -- but God had other plans for me. I wrote about the many things that made me know very definitely that I was a "called" man. I sent the written work in to the older minister who was to grade it. I was greatly surprised and deeply hurt when I received my work back with these words written on one of the pages: "If you would have had less rheumatism and more of the book, it would have been better." I think that I never afterwards had a kindly feeling towards that man.

Then there was the minister who was one of our teachers during the fourth Summer School. It seemed as if we did not really know him, and all of us felt that he was unfriendly. But as our study progressed that week, we came to know him as a very kind and friendly person. I remember how we all agreed that we had not really known him before and were very happy that he had been our instructor. Wanting him to know just how we felt, we delegated one of the class to tell him at our final session. It pleased him very much, and he was somewhat amused at our attitude toward him at first and the change that was made.

Another instructor came for one of the courses and immediately, at the first session, admitted that he knew little or nothing about the book from which he was supposed to teach. Even though the book was a difficult one, he told us, we could expect to have an easy time of it. "But God pity the next class," he closed his remarks by saying, "for I will then know something about the course." I never did know just what he did the next year with the class that followed us.

With the closing of the Summer School and the sending in of our written work on the other books, we were coming to the

end of our Conference Course of Study. Annual Conference that year began on June 16, 1931, at the Allison Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church in Carlisle, PA. William Fraser McDowell was the presiding bishop, and the Rev. Edgar R. Heckman was the host pastor. At the 1929 conference in Clearfield, Dr. Heckman had been appointed to the church in Carlisle. This meant that we had the unusual privilege of having the same bishop and the same host at both the conferences where we received our ordinations. It was a warm day in June of 1931 when our class again presented itself at the altar of the church, this time to be ordained as elders in the Church. It was almost suffocating as we knelt there with our wives and other family members in the pews immediately behind us. It was so warm that one minister's wife fainted and had to be taken from the church. Just a few years later this same church building became really warm -- it caught fire and burned to the ground.¹⁰

My father and mother, along with a sister and her husband, were present for the ordination service. For my father, it was the fulfillment of a prayer and a dream. He may not have understood all that was done that day, but I am certain that no one was as happy as he. I cannot remember many -- if any -- specific things that my father or mother said to me to guide me in the right way, but I do remember the kind of person each of them was. My father had been beside me at the altar when I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, and later he was there beside me when I dedicated my life to the Christian ministry. Now again, he was beside me at my ordination. Even though he died about forty years ago, I seem to feel his presence when I need him. Though about the same age as my father, my mother lived for almost thirty years afterward. One day when I was passing the home of the brother with whom my mother was then living, I had a great urge to say some things to her. Listening to the voice within, I went in and told her in simple words just how much I loved her and what she had always meant to me. I have never been sorry that I took the time to do that.

Ordination as an elder made me a fully ordained minister, one now privileged to accept the responsibilities given him. Even though I had not been privileged to secure a high education, I tried to go forward in the belief that it wasn't what I knew but the way I used what I had come to know.

Like the lad who gave his little into the hands of Jesus so that it fed the hungry thousands, I had given to Him my little and He multiplied it to cover those to whom I ministered. Even though the days of courses were over, I continued to read books and to become a more fully educated man of God. No one is ever too old to study or to learn.

After my four years in the Conference Course of Study and after I had been ordained an elder, there were many times I attended the Pastor's School held each summer at Lycoming

College. A couple of times the Women's Society of Christian Service would have their school at the same time, and my wife was able to go with me. For some reason the Pastor's Schools were usually held separately, yet I fully enjoyed them. I was sorry when my eyesight kept me from attending them. WE had persistently worked toward my ordination, and in the years since 1931 we have used the knowledge acquired to help God's people and to enlarge His kingdom in the hearts of all whom we were privileged to serve. It was a great thrill to be fully ordained, but I could never stop there. My goal was not securing the rights and privileges of ordination, but rather serving God and His people in the way that it needed to be done. And so from ordination I went on to the work that lay before me. In the following chapters I tell what WE were able to do in His name and for His people.

Chapter Six

WE Face Our Many Problems

Someone has said, "The difficult problems can be solved immediately, but it takes just a little longer to solve the impossible ones." Our problems were many; some were difficult, some seemed impossible, and none were ever easy. The most difficult ones centered around our finances. Because our expenses were many and high, and because we felt obligated to give into the work more than we received, we ended each year "in the red." I blame no one for causing that, for I believe it was due to our wish to do more for our people than what our limited budget would allow.

We were in debt from our second year in the ministry until our retirement. I am not ashamed of this fact, for there were many reasons for it. It was not due to mismanagement, indifference or living beyond our means. It was due primarily to a low salary, and too often the nonpayment of the full amount of it. In the early years, and even in some of our later years, we did not receive all of our annual salary. Hundreds of dollars have never been paid, and these amounts are still owed us. If paid, these amounts would have made living a bit easier for us. There were some of the sixty churches we served that just didn't care and never even tried to pay the salary in full.

The method of paying the salary and the conference items helped to put us in debt and to keep us there. More than half the churches we served never had a regular time for paying the salary, and we never knew just how much we would receive at any one time. As my wife has said, "We had to go to the churches on Sunday so that we would have something with which to buy our groceries." We were never certain that we would get anything on any given Sunday and, as a result, there were many weeks when we had very little or next to nothing to eat.

We had two healthy children, and it was difficult many times to have enough for them to eat. As parents, we learned how to do without if we had to -- and there were many times when that was necessary. Not every charge had a garden, and so were not privileged even to help ourselves. Sometimes vegetables would be given us, and my dear wife would process them for use during the winter months. She was and still is a very good cook; even though she had little to cook, she knew how to prepare good meals.

All during our forty-four years in the active ministry there was only one time that our heat for the parsonage was furnished. On only two charges was the telephone paid, and at no time were the utilities paid by the churches. We had to pay our own traveling expense, and with dirt roads to travel the auto tires would wear out all too quickly. We were constantly paying out money for car repair bills, and in the early days of our ministry the automobiles did not stand up to

the hard knocks as they do today.

The district superintendent was constantly reminding us that we needed to do more pastoral visitation, and the people found fault with us because we did not visit them as often as they desired. There were also times when the hospitals were a great many miles from the parsonage. How could we do more visiting? Could I constantly take our little money and buy gasoline instead of food? Could I let our two children go hungry, especially when their developing bodies needed nourishing food? We faced our financial problems in the best way possible, and today we wonder just how we were able to come through it all. This all may sound untrue to some, but we were never able to be clear of debt until after our retirement and after forty-one years or more in the active ministry.

During the three years following our retirement we served the two churches that WE had served during the three years before we retired. We had been requested to stay on by the bishop, the district superintendent and most of the people. I was the first minister in the Central Pennsylvania Conference to remain on the charge from which he had retired.

When we began to receive our pension along with our salary, we were able to do something that we were never able to do while we were in the active ministry --something that we had continued to look forward to -- we were able to become free of debt. We were also able to save enough money to make the down-payment on the property on which we now live. Even then, there were some who believed that we were receiving far too much money and who were critical of what we were doing. We continue to thank God for all that He did for us then and always.

One wonders if people would have been so critical if they had really known the situation. Our salary for the forty-four years ranged from \$900 to \$4870 and never exceeded the minimum salary set by the conference. In the fall or late summer of 1930, I felt the need of more education and we moved so that I could attend Dickinson Seminary.¹¹ Elmsport-Allenwood-Maple Hill,¹² the charge to which I was going was to pay a salary of \$900. With this amount I was to feed and keep my family, travel each day across a mountain to the school and pay all the other items of expense. The \$900 was certainly not enough to pay all the bills that needed to be paid, and I went to the local bank to ask for a very small loan to pay for my school. My request was not granted, and the cashier was rude and disrespectful to me and to the Christian ministry.

Soon after we had moved, I received a letter from the Justice of the Peace who lived in a community within my former charge of Rays Hill. He accused me of leaving the town without paying a \$16.00 garage bill and proceeded to tell me just what should be done with people who did such things. I had spoken to the garage owner before we moved and told him

that I was unable to care for the amount at the time, but that I would care for it just as soon as I was able. I wrote a letter to the Justice of the Peace mentioning that there seemed to be one law for the minister and another law for the people of the six churches I had served. As I so well remember, most of those churches had not paid me the salary in full -- and have never paid it. The church in the town where the JP lived was the worst offender, for they owed me \$54 more than I owed the garage. Just why should I have been called a dishonest minister when at the same time the church was not thought of as dishonest?

I requested to be moved at the end of the conference year and we were appointed to the Lock Haven Circuit, a charge with five churches¹³ and a salary of \$1400. The first year there I was to continue going to school, and I did not have a mountain to cross. But the great depression was in full progress. Instead of receiving \$1400, I was paid about \$800 -- less than what I would have received at the former charge. One of the churches that owed me over \$80.00 at the end of the conference year gave me a one dollar bill at the last official board meeting. I was told that this was all there was -- even though the treasurer had told me that I did not have to worry, that this particular church would be able to pay me in full. Why was I always in debt? The above and other incidents down through the years are the answer. Yet, I was expected as "a man of God" to pay my bills when due and not to bring reproach upon the local churches by getting into debt. Problems? My dear friends, we had them.

There have been some people on every charge and in every church who felt that we were well paid. Some even felt that as ministers of the Gospel we should live by faith. My wife was told this one day and her answer was, "If my husband stops at a filling station for some gasoline, can he say to the attendant that faith will pay for this?" No, we have received too many requests for payment of bills. We have found that money and only money satisfies our creditors. Jesus said that "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7) -- and as ministers of the Gospel, we are laborers. Money and finances were not our only problems, but since they involve so many things they come out number one on the list. We never thought of leaving the Christian ministry for a better paying job. We became rich, but our wealth was not in money or things; it was in lasting friendships and the good will of all the people whom we came to know as God permitted us to serve them in His name.

From the time our son started grade school until the time our daughter graduated from the Methodist School of Nursing in Philadelphia, we had moved six times. Thus the acquiring of an education was a problem to our two children as well as to their parents. In his first year in grade school our son learned a lesson in both honesty and dishonesty. One

afternoon he came home from school crying as if his heart would break. On questioning him, we found that the teacher had accused him of stealing. We learned that he had seen a penny on another student's desk and, not knowing yet that he should not take that which belonged to another, he took the penny. He was rather confused when he came home, for he told us of another boy who came to school every morning with plenty of change in his pocket. When other boys asked him where he got it, he answered, "From the pockets of my dad's trousers."

It seems that he took the money each night after his father had retired. Our son was at a loss to know why so much fuss was be made over his taking the penny when nothing was said to the boy who had taken so much more than he. We explained things to him and asked him to promise us that he would always try to do the right, no matter what others did. We also told him that, as the local preacher's son, he would have many problems to face and many would be looking for a chance to accuse him.

In the early years of his grade school experience, our son had a slight speech impediment. He would use the "F" sound instead of "TH" and the "S" sound for an "F" at the beginning of a word. Despite this, when he was in the third or fourth grade he became the best speller in his class. One day my wife and I were visiting our son's school to observe a spelling bee for his class. He was doing very well, and finally only he and a couple of other students remained in the line. We have always felt that he would have won easily that day had the teacher not taken advantage of his one weakness. She gave him the word "Thursday" to spell. Our son became confused between the letter "F" and the letters "TH" and was unable to spell the word correctly. We believe that the teacher knew what she was doing and that our son would have won the spelling bee if she had not tricked him in the presence of WE, his parents. Again we had words of advice for our son and told him of the problems he would have to face.

Our son started his schooling in a one-room schoolhouse, with just one teacher for all of the grades. Later we moved to a charge where there was a consolidated school, with a number of rooms and teachers. It was in this building that our daughter began her public schooling. A couple of moves later both of the children attended a two-room school. It was from this school that our son began to attend high school in a neighboring community. Our daughter would also have started to high school in the same community, but we were fearful of having her ride such a long distance. Before she was to attend high school, however, we moved to a town in which a high school was located. We felt that their high school educations were all set. Later we found out that the high school was an agricultural school, and they were not able to receive a strong foundation for entering their final high school. Yet both of them were able to graduate, although they

had a difficult time of it. Our son then continued his education at Dickinson Junior College while our daughter entered the Methodist Hospital School of Nursing in Philadelphia. Both graduated, and today our son is an associate minister in the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church while our daughter is a registered nurse in the Montrose High School.

The third major problem that WE had to face was health, or should I say the absence of it. This was especially true of myself. My mother often told me that I had been an unhealthy baby, and that even in grade school I was almost continuously afflicted with inflammatory rheumatism. As I grew into my teens, I began a period of good health that lasted until I was about thirty-seven. In 1936 I had the misfortune of breathing coal gas into my lungs as I was taking ashes out of the furnace. My throat muscles became tight, and I could hardly get my breath as I went upstairs. Inhaling the coal gas had started an asthmatic condition. My doctor told me that a bronchial condition had been there before, but that breathing in the fumes had been like throwing gasoline on live coals. My bronchial condition had exploded into a very severe asthmatic condition.

That year we moved from a four point charge¹⁴ (Fayetteville) to one with seven churches¹⁵ (Muncy Valley). The salary on the four point charge was \$900, and one church was twenty miles from the parsonage. The seven point charge was to pay \$1060 -- a raise of \$160 for serving three more churches and traveling many, many dirt roads. Two of the churches were about eighteen miles from the parsonage. The place to which we had moved had great possibilities of being made to look more beautiful. Each evening we would mow tall grass, cut weeds and do many other things until we tired. I would then sit with the family on the front porch to rest and cool off. I believe the combination of the coal gas experience, the weeds and the cool evenings caused me to become asthmatic, for each night in bed I would have to fight for my breath.

At first I wondered why God would allow such a thing to happen to me, to one of His ministers who continually had to use his voice. I found little or no help from our local doctor and the medicines that I tried. Many were the nights I felt that I would be very happy for God to take me. Yet, on the other hand, I could not bear the thought of leaving my dear wife and the two children. There were times when I would go behind the pulpit, especially in the evenings, not knowing whether I could preach or not. But I found that the asthmatic condition would leave me every time I started to preach, at least until I had finished preaching. Finally, the asthma and the work of seven churches caused my overall health to begin to fail. My wife told the district superintendent that it were not moved from the charge, it would not be long until she

would have to take me away from it in a coffin.

WE were then sent to Bloomingdale,¹⁶ a charge with one less church and a couple of hundred dollars more salary. There were some hard coal miners on that charge, and one of them told me about a powder that would help my asthmatic condition. From that powder, I found the needed relief. Some time later I tried another medicine that seemed to cure me of the asthma, but in this I was mistaken. A few years later when we moved to Barnesboro,¹⁷ the only one church charge that I was ever privileged to serve, I found that the gas from the burning coal refuse dumps caused the asthmatic condition to return in a worse way than before. Once during the latter part of the five years we were there, I almost died from my asthmatic condition. I felt the hand of death and it seemed there was to be no return. But God had other work for me to do, and in the years that followed I was seldom bothered by my asthmatic condition. I feel, however, that I shall never be entirely free from it.

During the four years that I served at Centralia,¹⁸ our next to the last charge, my problem was to be a lack of sight.

A cataract began to form on my right eye, and it was during the early years at Ulster,¹⁹ our final charge that I had it removed. Then the eye developed an infection, and I had a total loss of sight in the right eye. Now what was I to do? I had to adjust to this lack of sight, but the kind cooperation of the two congregations enabled me to do even better work than I had done before. The worst blindness one could have would be to be so blind spiritually as not to see the opportunities that still remained. My ministry there was to be the most outstanding period in all of my forty-four years of active service.

But I was to face an even more difficult problem. After I had become adjusted to the complete lack of sight in the right eye, a cataract began to form on the left eye. There came a time, especially after we had moved into our retirement home, that I was able to see very little. With the love and great devotion of my dear wife, I was able to do many things around the property that we had made our home. My two hands now became my sight; whenever I could not use my hands, my wife would help and guide me. It was during that winter, during a period of near sightlessness, that I wrote "Fifteen Old Testament Questions and Our Answers -- Sermons In Verse."

I also served a Community Church at the time, and this was possible through the kind cooperation of the people of that congregation.

Nor was I the only one with medical problems. When our daughter was about nine years of age, she would come home from school and say that she had a stomach ache. We gave her some medicine to help the condition, for at the time we believed that this was all that ailed her. Later, the teacher told us that our daughter would come to her at recess and at noon to tell her about the pain, and that she would try to bring relief by rubbing the place with her hand. But one day she became more ill than before, and we immediately called the doctor.

When the doctor arrived and had examined her, he told us that she had appendicitis and would have to be operated on as quickly as possible. Our problem was not whether there should be an operation, but just where and by whom. I had come to know the local doctor very well, as he had come to the community while we were on the charge and had tried to bring relief to my afflicted bronchial tubes. He would tell me of his education and training, and I had come to feel that anyone would be safe in his hands. When he asked me where I wanted him to take our daughter for the operation, I mentioned the Williamsport General Hospital. Then he said, "Why not the Muncy Valley Hospital at Muncy?" I told him that was alright to us. Then he said, "Whom do you wish to perform the operation?" I told him that I would let that up to him. Then he surprised me by saying, "I will do it if you wish." I then told him to take her to the Muncy Valley Hospital and that he was to perform the operation. He found that our daughter's appendix had burst and that gangrene had set in, but he also found that it had pocketed itself and that it had not spread throughout her body.

When the people of the church heard what we had done -- that we had placed our daughter's life in the hands of an unknown surgeon and that she had been taken to the smaller hospital instead of the larger one -- they were very critical. Almost immediately, however, our daughter began to get well and soon she was going about with others of her age. We moved from the charge soon afterward, but we learned that the doctor's success with our daughter's operation had caused others to trust him and that he became quite famous as a surgeon. At the time of this writing, the doctor is still in the community, and my wife and I were privileged to visit him recently in his home.

There is an interesting story connected to our desire to have our daughter become altogether well. After we moved to another charge, we decided it would do our daughter good to visit a couple of her cousins. We were confident that she would not be required to do anything that would hurt her, and she had a very pleasant visit. Some time afterward, she told us that she and two of her cousins had gone to a nearby limestone quarry where there was a very high and narrow trestle. Who was it that challenged the others to cross the

trestle with her? Yes, it was our daughter. We tell this to show how successful the operation had been. One must have faith in others, for there are times when our faith will bring rich rewards to us and to others.

The fourth problem that confronted us was our retirement. There were many questions as WE faced this new and important part of our life. The two main concerns were WHEN and WHERE? While I reached the retirement age of 65 in 1964, it was not until June 18, 1966, that I retired at the age of 67. As noted in a previous chapter, WE stayed on our last charge three years after I had officially retired. During those three years we made up our minds on certain things and were able to give definite answers to what had been perplexing questions. I had thought of a retirement home, and thus we had made an application to Bethany Village, one of our own Central Pennsylvania Conference Homes. We were accepted and were ready to go there right after the annual conference of 1969. Since we had not the privilege of saving enough money to buy a house, or even a mobile home, I thought of how nice it would be to have one's every need cared for.

But our son and daughter, as well as our son-in-law, very definitely entered into further discussions with us as they came to visit. They felt that we were both "too young" to become residents of a retirement home. We had been told that we would be the youngest couple at Bethany Village. And so I thought: if not Bethany Village, then where? Time was short and we had to do something.

It was then that our son-in-law challenged us, and that we made our decision. We were told of a property for sale only three tenths of a mile from our daughter and her family. Taken to the property, I immediately fell in love with it -- not only as we saw it that day, but also for what we could make it to become. It consisted of about one and one-half acres of land with an old mobile home that had a newly constructed room attached to it. We immediately made an about-face and began making plans for buying it. Some time later we had a brand new mobile home delivered to replace the old one. We did not have much more than \$2000 for a down payment, but we financed both the property and the mobile home. As of this date, May 21, 1973, we have only six monthly payments remaining.

Our problem had seemed so great, but as WE faced it WE were able to overcome what had seemed to be the impossible. Even now I ask myself, "Why were we so afraid?" It may have been because we had lived forty-four years in Methodist parsonages, never personally responsible for where we were going or where we would live. Now the choice was our own, and would we be able to make the right one? There have been times when I wished that I had not listened to others, yet I now

know that what WE had to do has made us both stronger in every way. Problems will never cease to be a part of life, but there is always an answer -- and one must work until he finds it. Our problems have been many, but WE have been made stronger in the facing of them. WE did not face them alone.

Chapter Seven

WE Make Many True Friends

FRIENDS

Ain't it fine when things are going
Topsy-turvy and askew
To discover someone showing
Good old-fashioned faith in you?

Ain't it good when life seems dreary
And your hopes about to end,
Just to feel the handclasp cheery
Of a fine old loyal friend?

Gosh! one fellow to another
Means a lot from day to day,
Seems we're living for each other
In a friendly sort of way.

When a smile or cheerful greetin'
Means so much to fellows sore,
Seems we ought to keep repeatin'
Smiles an' praises more an' more.
--taken from "Just Folks,"
by Edgar A. Guest

Someone has written these words, and I learned them quite a number of years ago. "The best way to get rid of your enemies is to make FRIENDS of them." No words are any more true than these; but to make them come true in a life, one must be willing to work hard and be able to face some bitter disappointments.

As I review the long list of the FRIENDS that WE have made in our years of ministry, I find they are numberless and represent our true riches. We have never grown wealthy in material things, but we thank God we are rich as to the number of our friends. I have often mentioned the fact that we never had much money, and that we cannot take it with us when we leave this world for the home prepared for us. But we will find that those of our friends who have gone on before us will be waiting to greet us when we arrive, and that they will help to make heaven really heaven for us and for many others.

There have been and still are many types of people whom we have made to be our friends. Let me take the word FRIENDS and make each of the seven letters the beginning of a word. Each word shows a source of our friends. Some have been easy to win, and others have been very difficult. "F" indicates that one source is to be found in other FAITHS, such as the Catholics and the Jews. "R" tells of the many RETARDED people who have become our dear friends. "I" reminds us of the INDIGENT, the destitute and the poor. "E" shows that we were able to make friends of those who were ECCENTRIC, those who depart from the normal customs and practices -- even to the point of being thought of as peculiar and/or erratic. "N" represents NATURAL friendships, including those who are normally friendly. "D" brings us to include the DESPISED or hated ones. Last, but certainly not least, are those whom we are even now coming to know - and so the "S" in FRIENDS stands for the SENIOR citizens. This chapter on FRIENDS may prove to be the longest in "WE," for WE have become very rich in FRIENDS. I wish to tell you about each of these types of friends, for they are all important to us and we love all of them.

The "F" in the word FRIENDS stands for other FAITHS. A man and a woman came to the parsonage one evening and requested that I give them some of my time. They were faced with a couple of very serious problems, and they had no answers for them. So that we might have a private conversation, I took them into the sanctuary of the church. The woman began by telling me that she was Catholic and that her friend was Greek Orthodox. They told me that they were in love and that they would like to be married, but that they could not go to the priest in either of the churches to which they belonged. I talked with them for two or more hours. The man was surprised that I had been willing to give them so much time, for he told me that I had given them more time in one evening than what his priest had given him in all the time that he had been going to the Greek Orthodox church. I had known the woman before that evening, for she had come to me before with other problems.

At the end of our conversation, they told me that if they were to marry each other they could not return to either of their churches. Then they asked me if I would perform the marriage ceremony in the Methodist Church and receive them into the membership of the Methodist Church. They knew what it would cost them to do this, but they were willing to do it so that they could always be together. They were married, taken into the membership of the Methodist Church and immediately became regular attenders who helped to support the church in a wonderful way. FRIENDS? Yes, we were friends and the people of our church became their friends. But they had come to know another Friend in a greater way and were willing to follow Him in a way that made them understand His words,

"Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

Once when the Jewish New Year was only a few days off, I thought that it would be nice to wish our Jewish FRIENDS a Happy New Year. I placed the words "A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO OUR JEWISH FRIENDS" on the church bulletin board. As our church was only a block from the downtown section, and on the corner of two main streets, I knew that our greeting would be seen. Some days after the Jewish holiday, I received a letter of thanks from the Jewish community. I had often taken the time to stop and talk with the Jewish merchants on the streets or in their places of business -- whenever and wherever it was possible to make friends with them, we used the opportunity. One year after I had returned from Annual Conference, one of my Jewish friends met me on the street and was the first to tell me that he and all the other Jews were happy that I would be with them for another year.

WE never thought of our FRIENDS as being Catholic, Jewish or Protestant -- or even as being without a faith or church. A certain Catholic priest and I would meet quite often on the street and discuss our common church problems. I would sit beside the priest at social functions and we would enjoy an evening together. I belonged to a service club where men of all faiths united in a common effort, and I never tried to get any of them to change to our church. In one community we had about twenty-five former Catholics who, mostly due to inter-marriage, joined the Methodist Church.

Near the end of our forty-four years in the ministry, we were friends with a particular Catholic priest. He would visit us in our home, and quite often I would visit him at his residence. It so happened that our parsonage in that community was surrounded by dwellings occupied by Catholic families. WE worked together for the good of the community, were loved by all faiths and returned that love. One Sunday morning, while the family just across the street was attending early Mass, a fire broke out in their home. We immediately opened the social room of the church to make hot coffee and sandwiches available to the firemen. One aged gentleman and his two grandsons were standing outside on the street, as their house had also caught fire. Because the temperature was near zero and they seemed very cold, we suggested that they come into our home to keep warm. They did not hesitate, but immediately followed me into the parsonage. When my wife invited them to have some breakfast, all three of them ate of our food and were very appreciative of what we had done. I could tell of other times when people of other FAITHS became our friends, but that would make our story too long.

The second letter of FRIENDS is "R," which brings to mind the RETARDED people whom I have met and to whom I became a helpful friend. Every charge and almost every church WE served had one or more retarded persons in its membership.

Starting with my very first charge, I have always tried to have such people understand that I was their friend and that as a minister in the community, I would give them the privilege to express themselves in both the church and the community.

I found that our retarded friends were, in most cases, deeply religious and that in their own way they would give to the church the best that they had. They were regular attenders at Sunday School and were always there for the church worship service. They were constantly being teased by those who often had less common sense than they, and many times their lives were made miserable by those who should have known better. I specifically remember one youth that was classified as a retarded person who once said to me -- just before his untimely death by drowning -- that he loved the church more than anything else in the community. He showed his love by regular attendance and he was never afraid to talk with me concerning the great place that the church had in his life. He knew all too well that the church had weaknesses, not unlike his own, but also that like himself it was doing the best job it possibly could.

I remember another such young man in one community who was not a member of the Methodist Church. He would always greet me on the street, in the post office and in the stores. Because he wanted me to know that he appreciated my friendship, he would tell me at times that he would attend our church worship service the next Sunday. He was always as good as his word.

And then there was a maiden lady who was a member of the Methodist Church and always in attendance at whatever was going on or being done in the church. Active in the Women's Society of Christian Service, she would take her place doing the things that needed to be done. When she died, I used the text, "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). Many related that this was the best funeral sermon they had ever heard. I answered by telling them that this was the life of that maiden lady and that I was only recounting the many wonderful deeds she had performed. RETARDED did I say? Maybe as society classifies people, but she knew God better than many who had no such handicap.

Finally, there was the young man who attended Church School and the worship service each Sunday along with his parents. He was one who was born with characteristics, especially of the face, like most other people; that is, he did not share the appearance of many who are retarded. His parents were very kind and helpful to him, and they gave him the best training possible. Even though he was not able to read a word, he would take the hymn book and "sing" along with all the others. And he was not just going through the motions of singing, as some may have thought. He was a deeply religious youth who was not trying to fool God or the people

in the church. After the worship service he would greet me at the door with a hardy handshake.

Of at least four persons in just one community who were thought of as being RETARDED, I had the sad experience of having funerals for three of them. Their apparently short and limited lives spoke volumes to those of us who were thought of as "normal." It seemed that I could do nothing else but love those who were less fortunate than we, those who gave to us so much love of out their own lives.

The third letter in FRIENDS is "I," which brings to mind the indigent -- those who were destitute and poor. My wife and I were visiting one forenoon in the home of a family that was very poor. They lived in a log house and had very little. Even though it was not noon when we were there, we were invited by the wife and mother to stay for the noon meal. She and her three children had come to the community from one of the southern states -- later a man who lived near the parsonage met this widow and married her. When she called us to eat, we found that she had prepared some southern-style biscuits and browned-flour gravy. There was little or nothing else to eat, yet I have never tasted such a delicious meal. Like the woman of whom Jesus spoke: she had given to us of her little, but she had given it in love (Mark 12:41-44). That made the difference.

Another widow lady, like so many others, had very little. One day she showed me two one dollar bills she held her in hand. She told me that the day before she had only one dollar bill and that she was asked to give it to a good cause. She had given all that she had. She then told me that her gift had not gone unnoticed by God, for He had given her the privilege of earning two dollars the next day.

A third woman, also a widow, had very limited eyesight. She lived alone in a house behind some tall bushes. As she seemed to be very interested in others, I visited her quite often. There appeared to be little that she could do, because of her limited vision, but one day she told me that she had a prayer list of over five hundred names and that she remembered each one of them in prayer every day. She had a radio and would listen to the hospital reports in order to pray for those who had just become patients. She was especially interested in those hospitalized from automobile accidents. She believed that God would answer her prayers, and every morning she would listen to the news and make note of how well each patient had become. She was very poor in material things, but she was rich in all that was spiritual.

Many of our best friends were the poor widows in each community. One day as I entered the home of a such a person, I was surprised at her physical features, for she was indeed quite homely. The outline of her body and her facial features would never lead one to think of her as beautiful. I was not there very long, however, before I found that I was standing

before a very beautiful woman. As I talked with her and she told me of her daily experiences, she said something that let me know that she was definitely a beautiful person. She said, "I would not wish to be even one moment without my Jesus, for He means everything to me." Jesus had made her truly beautiful. She was just a poor widow, but Jesus had done many wonderful things with and for her.

The "E" in FRIENDS reminds me of the Quaker who was discussing things with a friend. "It seemeth to me that everyone in the world is queer but me and thee," he said, "and sometimes I'm not so sure about thee." As WE served the hundreds of different people in our fifteen charges and sixty churches, I found that some of them were rather ECCENTRIC. Every church seemed to have one or more such persons. They were the people who, because they departed from the normal customs or practices, appeared to others to be peculiar or erratic.

We found such a person in our very first charge, and he lived just across the road from us. I well remember the evening at the end of the year, as we sat in the parsonage waiting for the New Year to arrive, that he suggested we all make some New Year resolutions. One of the first to make a resolution, he resolved that he would guard his appetite during the coming year. When we served a lunch soon after the start of the new year, however, he ate as much as or even more than any other person present. Almost every time that he visited us in the parsonage or met us at other places, he would say, "And how far is it to the moon?" Even though people judged him as being ECCENTRIC, he was a very kind man and most helpful in the work of the church and the community.

On another charge, an aged man would sit in the social room of a certain church that we served, smoke a cigar and tell us about the time they erected the building. The church was located in a community where tobacco was grown. He told us many times that the sanctuary of the church had been dedicated, but that the people had decided not to dedicate the basement or the social room -- so that they might be able to smoke in those places. I have often thought of this particular church as having a dedicated upper part or sanctuary and an undedicated, or should I say non-dedicated, lower part or social room. He and some others of the congregation may have been ECCENTRIC, but they were honest.

At one charge I had followed a minister who, because of some things that he had done, was forced to leave the ministry of the Methodist Church. He was looked upon as a good preacher and a friendly person, yet he was dishonest and the Conference had questions about his morals. I had quite a difficult time at that charge, and especially at one of the churches, for many of the so-called leaders would not forget their former minister. Once I stated that I might not be as eloquent a preacher as they thought their former minister had

been, but I knew one thing -- I was honest. One very ECCENTRIC man tried for a long time to find something I had done that he felt was wrong. One day I was informed that he had told his Sunday School class, "The preacher says that he is honest, but he is not, for he owes me thirty cents and has never paid it to me."

I was confused, for I could not understand just where and when I had done something that caused me to owe him such a sum. The answer came to me one day as I sat quietly in our home. "I have it, I have it," I called to my wife as I went up the stairs. I remembered that some weeks or months before, this same man who was then the Church School superintendent had given me a certain amount of money. I was to send to a particular company for some copies of a Children's Day program. We had sent too much money, and they had returned a credit voucher to me in the amount of thirty cents -- the very same thirty cents that I was supposed to have owed the man. I immediately wrote a letter to the company, requesting that they send the man the thirty cents and telling them just why I desired them to do so. I was never afterwards told about that small amount.

At one place our son had a teacher who was rather ECCENTRIC. There was in the school a certain family who never seemed to be as clean as they ought to be. Their hands as well as other parts of their bodies became covered with an itch. As always, so it seemed, our son was the first to get the skin disease from them and, as I have noted elsewhere, soon all four of our family had the itch all over our bodies. The teacher, however, blamed our son and not the dirty family for spreading the disease through the school. Knowing of the ECCENTRIC ways of this teacher, we did not argue with him.

Another certain school teacher was looked upon as being rather ECCENTRIC by her scholars and by people in general. She would attend the worship services now and then, and she seemed bitter when we tried to talk to her. In a way, she had a reason to feel that way. One day my wife and I visited her in her home. We allowed her to do most of the talking, for it seemed that she wanted someone who would listen to her. After a couple of hours or more, we left her home knowing that something had happened to her. The very next Sunday she was at the worship service; she attended regularly thereafter and was an altogether different person. ECCENTRIC? Maybe. She was a person who needed someone to take the time and listen to what she had to say.

The fifth letter in FRIENDS is "N." Most of our friendships were NATURAL and with people who were normally friendly. I believe this will be true no matter where one may live. I well remember the friendliness of the people on the first charge we served, but I also remember friendships formed on all of our fifteen charges and sixty churches. Many, if not most of them, were the stalwarts of the church and of the

community. I remember one man whom a great number thought of as being the "boss" in a certain church that we served. But I remember him as one on whom you could always depend. He was the treasurer of the church, and he was one of the very few treasurers we knew that did not make us wait for our small salary. The amount that was due to me was always ready and was always given to me at the end of the worship service. I remember how he would make arrangements for our noon meals on Sunday, for we would go from that church to another one for an afternoon service. Many times he would take us to a nearby restaurant for that noon meal, and I believe he would pay for it out of his own pocket. Yes, he did seem like a church "boss," but he was the kind of man without which the church could not get along very well.

At another church there was a man and his wife who were the local tax collectors. He knew of our meager salary and the difficult time that we had in receiving it. On election days, and on other days when help was needed, he would ask me to assist them with their work. He knew well that the couple of dollars he gave me for working would mean much to me, my dear wife and the two children. Many times he and his wife would give us some food, and we were always grateful to both of them for their kindness. Our daughter was born just a few months before we moved to the community in which those kind tax collectors lived. The man fell deeply in love with our sweet daughter. When we moved after a couple of years there, he told us that he would never love another little girl as much as he loved our daughter.

There were many others who appreciated the parsonage family and showed their love for us. We always tried to let them know just how much we loved them, for our love would help them to understand the kind of love that Jesus has for everyone. The Christian ministry was not our livelihood, but it was very definitely our life. Sometimes it would take us a little longer to get acquainted with some. Well do I remember two men at different churches on the same charge. When I first met them I felt that I would never be able to come to know them, but I was very wrong and it was not long until I had come to know them both. In fact one of them, even though he had hesitated for years to join the church, became a member while I was his pastor. Not too long ago I met one of those men, and he was still the same smiling friend that I had come to know him to be. How very wrong we can be when we try to judge others.

All the years WE spent in Christian ministry were in the rural field. We may find some of the greatest church leaders serving in the churches of the cities and the larger towns, but many if not most of them have come from some small rural church. WE felt that God had called us to a very important work, that of training our future leaders. Such persons are not always natural leaders, but they become the men and women

God wants them to be as they are willing to use the talents that He has given them. As we now look back over the years, we are able to recall those who were members of small churches we were privileged to serve who received Jesus Christ into their lives and became useful Christians under our direction and ministry. WE never served an unimportant church. They were churches with small memberships, but they were churches with a high and a mighty task to perform.

WE worked all the years of our ministry with people of seemingly little talent, but with people who later in life were able to live powerfully for the Kingdom of God. I could give the names of young men who were interested in the work of their local church that we helped to decide to become ministers in the Central Pennsylvania and other conferences. As I read the names of the ministers in the Conference Journal, I am able to note the names of those whom our lives have touched. In most instances they were men with a NATURAL style, and they continue to be so. They are people who might not be doing the things the world calls big, but they are doing the small but very important things of the Kingdom.

The sixth letter in FRIENDS is "D," which reminds us of our friends that were DESPISED and/or hated by others. WE never had to hunt them out so that we could minister to their needs, for they would come to us. They knew that we were willing to talk to them and that we would do all that we could to help them. It seems that most of these people were women, although there must have been some men who were hated by others.

One maiden lady, whom we have mentioned before, was a school teacher that was hated by many of the parents in the community where she taught, and even by some of the members of the church. As noted earlier, she was bitter because life had not been as pleasant for her as it should have been. One Sunday she invited us to come to her home during the week for a visit. Sensing that there was something of importance she wished to talk about with us, we accepted her invitation.

WE went to her home early in the afternoon and were graciously received. We were invited to sit down, and after a while she opened her heart and her life to us. We were unable to speak many words to her, for it seemed that she wanted to pour out her heart to us. WE were never better listeners than we were that afternoon. She wanted someone who would listen to what she had to say and to understand her. It is not always easy for a minister and his wife to listen for three hours or more, but we did it and it paid in the long run. I do not remember what she said, but I do remember that she was anxious to say it to someone.

Following that afternoon with us, she began to attend the church worship services and seemed to be an altogether different person. People of the church noticed a big difference in her and wondered what had happened. She had

wanted understanding and someone to listen to her, and the people of the church had been too busy to notice that one among them had a great need. All they had been willing to give her were criticism and hatred. She became a different person when she found just two people who would listen and who cared very much.

Another woman had a husband who was a drunkard. Almost every time that he came home from a night of drinking, he would beat her until she lay bleeding and hurt. Once he came home in a drunken stupor and broke one of his wife's legs. He became so cruel that she came to talk with me about what she should do in such a situation. I had heard of her before she came to me, and some of the so-called good people of the church and the community were quick to tell me that no decent person would have anything to do with her. She was at the place where she felt the only answer was to divorce her husband. Later she met a fine man, married him and joined the Methodist Church -- in fact, I have told you their story in another part of this chapter!

In another community, a mother and one of her daughters were really hated by both the people of the community and the people of the church. They were poor folk, and they were accused of earning money in immoral ways and of doing many other things that were wrong in the eyes of other people. We did not sanction what they were supposed to be doing, but we knew that Jesus did not condemn the woman brought to him in John chapter 4. The daughter finally became a patient in the hospital, and it was there that I learned to know her and her mother. They deeply appreciated my hospital visits, and they invited me to visit in their home.

I continued to show my interest in them, especially as it related to their relationship to God and the church, and so I invited them to attend the church worship services. One Sunday morning after I had gone up to the pulpit, and after we had started the worship service, the church door opened and there stood this hated woman and her daughter. As the church sanctuary was filled almost to capacity, the only vacant pews were at the front of the church. The so-called leaders of the church had already taken the back seats, and the middle pews were filled with other people. The mother and daughter walked quietly up to the front of the church, went around the center pews and found a couple of vacant places in one of the front pews.

When they stopped attending, I was perplexed as to why they did not keep on coming. I was informed that some so-called righteous person had said on that first Sunday, "Just who does she think she is, parading herself and her daughter up the aisle to the front seat?" I understand that it was said loud enough for the woman to hear it. The result was that she and her daughter never came again. Just how insensitive can some people be, WE thought, for they did not know that their

unkind words had spoiled all my efforts.

The seventh and final letter in FRIENDS is "S." WE are now and have for a few years been SENIOR CITIZENS. Seven is the number of fulfillment, and as senior citizens WE are now finding the fulfillment of some of our hopes and dreams. Many of our friends are senior citizens. Soon after moving to our home here at Sunset View four years ago, we started to attend the monthly meetings of the Susquehanna County senior citizens group known as the Sunshine Club. At the present time my wife is the recording secretary and I am the chaplain. Both of us enjoy meeting with the men and women of our own age.

Over half of the membership is from Montrose, and many of them are members of the Montrose United Methodist Church. WE have come to know the members and have established the name tag system there. In the church and in the community, WE are still "making friends." What a great time of rejoicing we shall have when we come to the end of our stay here and join with them in that Home above. FRIENDS! Who is really able to live without them?

Chapter 8

WE Face Many Hatreds, But Love Overcomes Hate

On one of the fifteen charges that we served, we heard of a former minister who one day told the district superintendent, "I love everyone on this charge, and everyone loves me." The district superintendent was supposed to have answered him by saying, "Brother, it is time for you to move."

The last chapter told about our many friends, their love for us and our love for them. WE had to learn the hard way that not everyone loved us and that some really hated us. It is never easy to learn to love those that hate us, as Jesus commanded us to do, but WE found that love was able to overcome hate in almost -- if not every -- instance.

Our first real experience of having two people hate us, and to show their hatred, occurred after WE had moved from the charge on which they lived. Our relationship began with what seemed to be a deep mutual love. We were often entertained in their home, and at times we would go places together. Some people have a way of not telling you about the illness of someone in their household and then finding fault if you do not visit the one that is ill. That was what happened here.

The aged mother of the two became seriously ill, but I was not told about it. She died. In some manner I learned about the death, but it was not until the day of the funeral and just a couple of hours before the funeral service was to be held. Immediately, I went the long distance from the parsonage toward their home and arrived just as they were leaving for the church. I turned and went on to the church, where I was completely ignored when I tried to talk with the family or the former minister they had engaged for the service.

Soon afterward I moved to another charge, and it was not long until I received a letter from the district superintendent. He indicated that he had received a letter from the two people accusing me of a number of things. He had been told that I refused to go and visit the mother and that after her death I refused to be at the church for the funeral.

He was also told that I refused to talk with them at the cemetery. Lies, lies, all of the accusations were lies. The district superintendent informed me that these were serious charges which, if true, could cause me to lose my place in the Christian ministry. I wrote and told him just what had happened and that everything they had written him was untrue.

When I told him what really happened, he believed me and said that he wondered why I had even gone to the funeral. God showed us how to love them.

Once WE and our two very young children were invited to a farmer's home for an evening meal. While at the table, the lady of the house told us about almost everyone in the church in that community -- and she didn't have a good thing to say

about any of them. The she said, "You may hear some things about me, but don't you believe them." Later she asked me to teach her Sunday School class and disagreed with my interpretation of a Scripture verse. After Sunday School she walked out of the church in a very angry mood, her face announcing just how much she hated me. But WE were able to have her as a friend again, as love overcomes hate.

At another church and a few years later, it seemed as if the devil himself had been let loose. A number of people, mostly men, caused me all kinds of trouble and objected to almost everything that I tried to do. In their anger and hatred, they accused me of many things and made life all but unbearable for me and my family. I visited one of the men when he was on his death-bed. He was unable to talk to me, but he looked up at me with tears in his eyes and then wept bitterly. I knew that he was thinking of what he had said and what he had done to the parsonage family. I tried to let him know that WE still loved him very much. God's love in and through His Son Jesus Christ our Savior made it possible for us to forgive and to really forget. I could tell of many hatreds in that one congregation, hate that was aimed directly at me. In the end, I became stronger as WE faced the hatreds, loved and forgave.

At times there were entire congregations that would show hatred toward us. On one charge, in what was then the northern part of the conference, a certain man asked me if I had made plans to go the community fire hall to dance and play bingo. He told me that I needed to meet people there. This conversation took place in the social room of the church. When I told him that I would never go to such a place and do what he suggested, he turned on me angrily and said, "Well, if you don't, then you won't be here very long." His prediction came true. One day his wife told my wife that the people of the church dearly loved her and our two children, but that they just could not stand me. I will never know how much hate was generated toward me in that church all because I would not do the low mean things that they wanted me to do.

One evening the district superintendent visited in our home on that charge and told us the people were demanding that we move. He was supposed to defend the minister at such a time, but he was entirely with the congregation. He made a number of promises to us, promises that he never kept. How did WE react to all this hatred? When appointed to our next charge, Robertsdale,²⁰ WE tried from the very beginning to show a deep love for the people. They responded to our love and WE were able to be with them for five wonderful years, years that neither we nor they will ever forget. And so when one congregation hated us, we did not hate them in return; we poured out our love to another congregation, or should I say another charge. One day I met that former district superintendent at the Newton Hamilton Training Camp and told

him of the wonderful time we were having. He smiled and said, "I'm glad that I could send you there." His words were sour grapes.

At another place near the center of the conference almost the entire charge turned against us like wild beasts trying to devour a small defenseless animal. I had not moved to this charge because I desired to do so, as I was in the midst of the sixth year of serving at Barnesboro, at the western edge of the conference and the only single church charge of my ministry. I left because the gas from the burning coal dumps near the parsonage had caused me to be near death a couple of times. That gas greatly irritated my bronchial condition, and my doctor told us I would soon die unless we moved to a place where there was no gas.

WE tried to do our best for the people, and little by little my health was restored. I received ill will and was hated by many of the people in one of the churches when I was forced to have a Sunday School treasurer resign because she could not account for over one thousand dollars. Soon afterward, we were involved in a bad automobile accident that sent both of us to the hospital. (A tractor-trailer rammed us from the rear as we were making a stop for a school bus.) Then the medication we received at the hospital caused each of us to develop a bad and painful carbuncle. In fact, my wife had to return to the hospital several times due to the carbuncle and a back injury that she suffered in the wreck.

Then one day I received a letter from the district superintendent informing me that the people of the charge were demanding my removal. They felt that we were in such physical condition that we would never again be able to do the work expected of us. I had learned a lesson long before that: it isn't so bad to be hated and kicked around when one is able to stand up and fight back, but it hurts so much more when one is down and unable to defend himself.

My final sermon to the people of that charge was a message that they will never forget. A man told me as he came out of one of the churches, "I have never heard a sermon like that, especially when the minister is being hated so much." Later the district superintendent told me that the people got in touch with him almost immediately and asked that WE be permitted to stay. If I could preach a sermon like that when WE were being hated so much, they told him, they wanted us to stay with them. Again WE moved, this time to Centralia, near the eastern edge of the conference. Again WE loved the people in our new charge, and again they responded to our love. WE were with them for four years and had a very happy time with them -- all because we let them know just how much we loved them. Love will always prevail over hate.

It isn't easy to pinpoint hate, for people hate certain conditions and not the people at which they direct their hate. We could not keep from growing older, and we were now at the

age when many looked upon us as being "too old." The bishop knew of the good work we had done during our four years at the Centralia charge, and he wanted us to move to the Ulster charge in the northern tier of counties that had been transferred from various New York conferences.²¹ He felt that we would be able to help them make the adjustment as they began working within the Central Pennsylvania Conference. A young man had just been on that charge, and he had been there for only one year, so our work was really cut out for us.

We shall never forget the first evening on our new and final charge. About three months past my sixty-fourth birthday, I was looked upon as being an "old man." People were a bit hesitant about receiving us as their spiritual leaders, and many of them demanded a younger man. Two married couples came to the parsonage that night. While the one couple made us feel welcome and "at home," the man of the second couple told us that many of the younger couples were not very happy that an "old man" had been sent to be their minister. My wife and I said nothing in return. We made up our minds that WE were going to make this some of our best years of ministry. WE started in and worked very hard. I tried to preach the best sermons possible; we showed unusual interest in the youth, and in all age groups, doing some things that had never before been done on that charge. Things went well, and the two churches were filled to capacity each Sunday morning for the worship services. Would the young married couples take notice of what was happening? At least they began to work very well with us, and WE were able to do many things during that first year.

Almost a year later a man came to the parsonage. He was the one who had told us that many did not want an "old man" as their minister. But he was an honest and understanding man, and so he said to me, "I have come to apologize for what I said to you a year ago. We have found that the *old man*, as I called you, has done more for us in this one year than all the young men we have ever had before." Where was the HATE? They had hated the idea of having an "old man" as their minister. In love I had showed them they were wrong. In the end, WE stayed with these people longer than WE had stayed at any other charge.

Why do so many people, especially so-called Christians, HATE when it is so much better to love? Even now in our retirement years we still see HATE at work -- not so much against us, but against other ministers. So great is some of the hatred that it divides congregation so they cannot do any effective work. It isn't easy to love as we ought to love when we have been hated, or even when we ourselves have hated. As one grows older he may feel "too old," but I have found that some of the best years of our forty-four years in the active ministry were those when I was near or over sixty. At our last charge, more than half of each congregation was

composed of young people. But the youth did not prevent us from ministering to the churches, for the "old man" was able to lead them into many paths of endeavor. Jesus has said, "Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). To HATE seems to come naturally, but one must learn to love.



THE WILLIAMS FAMILY 1969

Back row: June and Rev. James Robert Williams, Rev. Oren and Helen Williams, Eleanor and Doyle Thomas
Front row: on the right—the six grandchildren, three from each family
on the left—the husband and infant son Eric of granddaughter Nancy Williams Moyer
Notes: (1) the small boy in front is now Rev. James Oren Williams, pastor of Grace U.M. in South Williamsport
(2) Nancy Williams Moyer is the mother of Jason J. Moyer mentioned in the editor's postscript

Chapter Nine

WE Minister to All the Needs of All Our People

In our forty-four years of Christian ministry in the churches of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, WE always tried to minister to all of the needs of all of the people. WE ministered to the spiritual, the physical, the mental, the moral, as well as the financial needs. Then, too, WE ministered to the needs of the aged, the youth, the children -- for each one needed our ministry. The rich, the poor, the well, the sick, the high, the low, the educated, the uneducated -- everyone knew that WE were interested in them and wanted to help them with their problems. We also remember those in sorrow, the lonely ones, those who had suffered a loss in one way or another, even the joyful ones.

If I were to tell about our ministry to everyone, this story would never end. I have therefore selected only a few instances that stand out and which we are able to recall. I will not mention names, or the church of which any was a member. Many of those of whom I now write have already gone to their reward in heaven. Some who read what follows may know of whom I write, but WE know that you will be able to say "Amen" to what is recorded.

No one but my dear wife and I will remember the first person about whom I write. At the time, we lived along a road that was one of the main highways in the state of Pennsylvania and in the entire nation. An aged negro man knocked at our door one evening and asked for something to eat. While it is the custom to hand a sandwich or two to one making such a request, we had been eating our evening meal and so we asked our friend to come in, eat at our table and share our humble meal. As he ate, he told us about himself. He was from New York City and on his way to one of the far western states to live with his daughter. She had told him that if he could get to her home, then he could live with them for the remainder of his life. After he had eaten at the table, my wife packed him a few extra sandwiches and he was on his way. We have often wondered if he ever made it to his daughter's home. We prayed that he would.

Once I received an evening telephone call requesting that I go to the home of an aged man whom the family felt was on his death-bed. I tried to help the family in their sorrow, and I spoke words of comfort to the dying man. It was not long until he lost consciousness and, as the day began to dawn, he died. I had stayed all that night, and the family has never forgotten what I was willing to do for them and their loved one.

Another time a boy who was about twelve years old and the only child in the family had climbed up on the rafters of grandfather's garage. He slipped, fell to the concrete floor

and landed on his head. He died from the injury. I went to the parents' home to bring what comfort I could. The mother was heartbroken and cried out, "Why did God take my only child when there are families nearby that have a number of children?" I tried to console her and told her that I believed it was not God's will that her son should have had the accident and died. At the funeral, on a Sunday afternoon, I was told to make the service as brief as possible. I had something that I wanted to say, however, and I took the time to say it. I have always felt that it was the thing to do. As I spoke to the parents, the grandparents and others, I told them that this earth is God's flower garden and that God Himself is the gardener. There are times when there is a tragedy and God finds one of His tender flowers crushed and dying. He then reaches down, plucks it and takes it for Himself. With His care and love the tender plant will never really die, and we shall see it some future day. The parents knew what I was talking about, for they never lost interest in the church and came to be most dedicated workers in it. God had helped me to understand this particular need and to minister to it.

I remember one certain man, to whose need WE ministered, that was not interested in the church, the Christian religion, or any religion. When WE first met him, he was what today would be called a senior citizen. He had become very ill and WE visited him many times in his home. At first he was very unresponsive to my suggestions that we pray about his need. When I would ask him if he would like me to pray before I left, he would answer indifferently, "Do as you please." Then I would always pray for him and his family, and I would try to understand the reason for his indifference.

After I had visited him a few times, I was pleasantly surprised when he requested prayer soon after my arrival. He gradually became interested in prayer and in what God could do for him through Christ Jesus. My visits became times of rejoicing for him and his family, and it was not long before God brought a great change in him. The change was very evident, and we were all happy that it had come. We never tried to force anything on him, for he was the type of man who would have resented that.

Later this man was taken to the hospital. One day when I visited him there, he did not want prayer and he requested that I omit it during my visit. I knew, however, that he had accepted Jesus Christ into his life and that he was prepared for death. After I had gone from his room, a group of people from an extreme fundamentalist church came and forced themselves on him. They prayed in loud voices and insisted that he give his heart to Jesus. I knew these people and their methods. The man died soon afterward, and his widow invited the minister of that church to assist me at the funeral. She told me afterward that they felt her husband had

been gloriously saved at the time when those people were in the hospital room, and she wanted him to assist because of what he had done. She never mentioned the many times I had visited her husband in their home and the gradual change that had come into his life.

One day when I was talking to one of their ten sons, I asked him a question. I asked him whether he believed his father was saved at the time the group was with him in the hospital room, or did he think that it came about gradually as I ministered to his needs in their home. He said that he felt his father was very definitely saved as I visited him. The son was a man of integrity; he knew that his father could not be forced into something, but that he could be led. Little by little I had led him into a glorious experience.

Some came to us when their marriage was falling apart. We would do all that we could to bring peace where there had been so much discord. Others asked us to help them when they were troubled in mind because of what had happened to them in the past. If we were to tell of all these people, this chapter would never come to a close. It seemed that the older we grew the more we were asked to help in times of need. We were able to help not only people of the churches we were serving, but also many whom we did not know and who asked for our help. The important fact was that they had great needs and felt that WE would be able to help them.

I well remember the afternoon when our door gong sounded and a young lady stood on the porch. She said that she had a real problem and that she would like to talk with me for a little while. I had never met her before, and during our conversation I found out that she lived in a neighboring community. We spent about three hours talking about her problem, and when she left she seemed satisfied with the visit. I never turned anyone away and always tried to help. I did not always have an answer, but I hoped that they would, with God's help, eventually find one.

Many times when I would attend seminars and meetings, I would feel that my education was too limited for me to help anyone. I soon found out that it was not how much I knew that was so important, but the way I made use of the little I knew.

Quite often I thought of what my dear father had said to me when I decided to marry the girl that I loved; he believed I could find some other girl who would make a better wife for me. Together, however, we have been used of God in and through Jesus Christ to meet the needs of many hundreds of his people. I believe that I can honestly say that many *thousands* of His people have been helped by our ministry.

Even though our salary was so very low, and the traveling expenses so high, yet WE tried to minister to the needs of the people as we made our pastoral calls. Unlike some ministers, I never felt that it was so important to emphasize the number, or quantity, of our visits. I would ask

myself instead, just what have I accomplished by this visit? Even if it would take me a couple of hours at one place, I would stay and talk with the individual or individuals until we had come to some very definite conclusions. By using this method, I was able to minister to and meet the needs of those to whom I had gone and those who had requested a visit from me. Even the visits made in the hospital were not the in-again, out-again visits. If it took me a longer time than I had planned, then I used it to help the individual.

One day I visited a woman whose big toe had been bothering her. She had gone to the hospital to visit her husband, who was a patient there. I was in the room when she visited her husband, and she said she was going to have the doctor examine her toe. I left after the visit, and the next day I was surprised to hear that she had to have one of her legs amputated. Some days later she had to have the other leg amputated also. After that, I visited them many times in their home and would administer Holy Communion to them there.

Despite all they had to go through in the hospital, neither the wife nor the husband had lost the sense of joy. She in her wheelchair and he with his cane would go slowly about doing the housework and cooking. Many times I would find them preparing fruits and vegetables for winter use. Both of them have gone to the heavenly reward.

At times someone would say to me, "You do not come to our house as often as Rev. So-And-So came. He would come and spend the day and do certain things with us." That may have been a good relationship, but other people needed me much more than a selected few. The places where some of the people lived were not easy to get to, and many times the car got stuck in the mud, but WE always found that it was worthwhile to make the extra effort. Such roads and traveling kept us poor, but those to whom WE were going to see helped to make us really rich.

Our main task was evangelism, or the winning of precious souls to Jesus Christ. I always felt that it was better to minister to the other needs of the people first, and then their spiritual needs could be ministered to naturally. Many hundreds of souls were won by our efforts, and not always at evangelistic services -- sometimes at a bedside in a home or hospital, or sometimes just by sitting beside a needy one who wished so much to talk to someone. Most of the people to whom WE ministered accepted Jesus Christ as Savior -- not so much because we asked them to accept Him, but rather because they were able to see Jesus in us.

The churches were far apart on most of the charges that WE served, and thus it was never easy to find all who needed our ministry. The highest number of churches that WE served on any one charge was seven. WE served two charges of six churches, four charges of five churches, two charges of four churches, two charges of three churches, three charges of two

churches, and only a single charge of one church. The needs were very much the same in all fifteen charges and all sixty churches. WE ministered to all the needs of all the people.

One day as I entered a home to visit a sick man, I found that the doctor was on his way out. He was an understanding man, for he said to me, "I believe that you can do more for our patient than what I have been able to do." The man needed both of us, but the doctor was the only one that was called by the family. People are not always aware of their deepest needs, or the needs of their loved ones.

There were times when WE would go together to visit a sick or a needy person. I always felt that my wife had much to give, and she always seemed willing to share what she had.

My dear wife felt that WE were a team, and that God wanted us to work together to help His people. God gave us a very full ministry. We like to feel that WE did somewhat like Jesus when it was said of Him that He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

Chapter Ten

WE Retire: The Years Following Retirement

What seemed to be the end of our active ministry really became the most important and productive years of our lives. It was soon after I became sixty years of age that WE began to look forward to our retirement. Even though I had hoped that we could and would retire when I reached sixty-five, it was not until June 18, 1966, a couple of months after I became sixty-seven, that I received my Certificate of Retirement. We had served the Ulster-Milan United Methodist Churches for three years and, even though we were retiring, were asked to return for another year. I returned for the fourth, the fifth, and then the sixth year -- or for three years after I had retired. I understand that WE were the first minister and wife to return after our retirement to the charge we had been serving, although several others have done so since that time.

It was almost a year before I retired that I had a cataract removed from my right eye at a well-known hospital near where we were living. But on Sunday, July 4, 1965, the eye became infected and the infection caused me to lose the sight of the right eye. WE then had to make a very important decision. Would we ask for our retirement then, or should we make this a new beginning in the years of our ministry? The two congregations were very willing for us to continue with them, and thus the next four years were to be years that neither we nor they would ever forget. I had come to feel that the worst thing that could happen to me was not physical blindness, but blindness that would cause me not to see the great challenge that was mine. We accepted the challenge. With the help of God in Jesus Christ, and with the wonderful cooperation of the two congregations, WE were able to come to the end of our active ministry with praises in our hearts and on our lips to God for all that He had done.

Even though I had 20/20 vision in my left eye after I had lost the sight of the right one, I felt there might come a time when I would lose the sight in that one also. At the very beginning of 1969, the year that was to be our final one in the active ministry, even though we were officially retired, I began to notice that something was definitely happening to the sight of the left eye. I saw patches of fog before me as I walked to the post office for the mail, and it became more difficult for me to see to drive the car. I was alone at home at the time, as my wife was helping to care for her own mother in Media, Pennsylvania.

I went to see an eye specialist in Williamsport. He told me that I had a cataract developing in my left eye and that it would not be long before I would be unable to see with it. I wrote a letter to my wife to tell her what was happening; I also wrote letters to our son and daughter to tell them the news. We had previously been accepted for

admission to the United Methodist retirement home at Bethany Village, but our children and their spouses all felt that "Mother" and "Dad" were too young for such a place. We then purchased a property near to where our daughter and her family lived, and we also purchased a mobile home. But now, considering my worsening sight, what should we do? I told them we would go ahead with our plans and that nothing would be changed. After the conference sessions of 1969, we would go to live in our new home.

But what about the two churches? I still had about six months before I would be leaving them. I told them what was happening to my eye, and I asked for their prayers. When I asked for lay assistance in the worship services, the people responded in a wonderful way that put new life into the churches. During the latter part of April, 1969, my sight returned to the point where I was able to drive the car that I had not driven since the beginning of January. God had answered the prayers of the people. WE were able to finish our work with them and to begin working on our new property before my sight began to fail again.

It was on Tuesday, June 10, that we had our household goods moved from the parsonage in Ulster to our new home. During the remainder of June, we traveled back and forth for the final worship services and meetings. Our final service was on Sunday, June 29, and after that service I would no longer be the pastor of a United Methodist Church. That was a very sacred time for us, as we were also bringing to a close forty-four years of United Methodist ministry. As a minister had not been appointed to the charge at conference time in mid-June, I promised the district superintendent that I would care for the worship services as long as I was needed. I had several weddings during July and August, as well as some baptisms. There were times we would go over on Saturday and stay overnight at the parsonage.

On Wednesday, August 27, a group of people from the East Bridgewater Community Church visited us in our home and asked me to become their minister. I began my work with them on Sunday, September 21, and was with them for almost three years. I resigned my position with them in August of 1972, and a couple of weeks later we joined the Montrose United Methodist Church.

There were many things that needed to be done when we moved to our new home at Sunset View. Now that we were free of our many duties, we thought we would work long and hard. But my left eye became such that I could not see very well and, soon after we had finished our summer work and placed skirting around the mobile home, the doctor classified my condition as total blindness. I was totally blind in the right eye, and the cataract on the left eye had covered the entire eye.

The winter of 1969-70 was long and brought a great deal

of snow. The shoveling kept us busy, and after a while we could tell that spring was not far away. During the summer of 1970, even though my sight was so very limited, we were able to have a garden. We were kept busy mowing the grass, looking after the garden, picking up what seemed like tons of stones, and with many other duties. I bought a roto-tiller to prepare the soil for planting. I would then take the hoe and make the rows for planting the seeds, while my wife would drop them in and cover them. When it came time to cultivate, my wife would take the hoe along the row and I would follow with the roto-tiller; we damaged only a few plants. When I wanted to do special weeding, I would have to get down as near as I could to the earth. There was always a way to get things done, for our heavenly Partner was ever with us and opening up new ways for us.

It was a bit difficult for me to mow the grass that summer. Even though I could faintly see where to go, I could not tell where I had already mowed and where I hadn't. We overcame this problem by me following my wife as she went ahead of me with her mower. Our daughter and her family, as well as our son and his family, were particularly helpful to us during that time. I do not know what we would have done without them, especially without the knowledge and help of our son-in-law.

Stones both great and small were everywhere. We had brought a four-pronged rake with us when we moved, and we found it very useful for gathering up the stones. We worked together and believed that each of us should have his own tools -- four-pronged rakes, grass and leaf rakes, grass trimmers and even power mowers. We thought of these as "his" and "hers." My wife had a love for gathering up the stones, both the small ones and the large ones, and many times she would take the sledge hammer to break up the larger ones. Our wheel-barrow was kept busy transporting the stones to their designated place. We are still taking out stones, from both the garden and the yard, but we have fewer of them.

We kept busy digging out and filling in. We tore down an old building and filled in a large hole, and that made the entire yard free of obstructions. We planted a small orchard of dwarf fruit trees, and in the fall of 1972 we had some delicious pears. We have three apple trees, two pear trees and a cherry tree. A lilac bush in the front yard was almost a dense wilderness, but we have transformed it into a cluster of beautiful bushes. We planted several lilac bushes along the foundation of a barn that had burned a few years before we came here, and we planted several kinds of flowering bushes and evergreen bushes in the front of our home. Two of the bushes mean much to me, as they are from the roots of a mock-orange bush that was in our yard where I lived as a child; many times I played and slept in its cool shade.

Our home at first consisted of a room with a basement

under it, plus the new mobile home. We later added another room at the rear of the house, a room that helps to keep the winds from striking us so heavily in the winter. Even though we did not have heat installed in it, it is a beautiful room that we use in the summer months, and even some of the colder months, often for our family get-togethers.

As 1969 came to a close, the cataract on my left eye allowed me to see very little. I used a marking pen to make out my sermon outlines, and even then it was difficult for me to see the words I had written. The youth of the East Bridgewater Community Church would share the scripture lesson and lead in the other things that demanded reading. For the marriage and baptismal ceremonies, I used a marking pencil to make special copies of the rituals. I used my typewriter very little, and only with a special magnifying glass. It became impossible for me to drive the car and to do many things that needed to be done in and around our home.

On Monday, December 15, I was taken to an ophthalmologist in Williamsport who designated my sight condition as total blindness. I asked him if I should use a white cane, and he suggested that it would be a good thing for me to have. He recommended a particular drug store, and on our way out of the city we stopped to make the purchase. While leaving the store, however, I did not wait for my wife who was paying for the cane. As I held my new cane in my hands, I missed the first step and fell sprawling on the sidewalk. I immediately saw the need of using my cane. As I lay on the sidewalk, I saw some white shoes in front of me; as I looked up, there stood a nurse. She asked me if I had hurt myself in the fall. It was a painful lesson that I learned that day.

I had been told that day that plans would be made for an operation at a hospital in Williamsport. But when I returned to the ophthalmologist in March of 1970, he told me that he had made other plans. After reading over my records from the hospital where I had my first operation, and where I had lost the sight of my right eye, he felt that he was unable to perform the operation. "You will need the best surgeon in the world to perform the operation on your left eye," he said to me.

When I returned to his office on Friday, July 17, he suggested that I go to Lankenau Hospital in Philadelphia to have Dr. Robb McDonald, the best eye surgeon in the world, perform the operation on my eye. He called the hospital and the surgeon while we were there, and we made plans for me to enter the hospital on Monday, September 21. All I had to do now was to wait. A sister of my wife and her husband, who lived in Media, invited my wife and daughter to stay with them while I was in the hospital.

Sunday afternoon, September 20, we traveled to Media. I sat in the back seat, while my wife and daughter were in the

front, and I could not see anything along the highway. It was a long and lonely trip for me, and I was to remember this on our return trip. After staying Sunday night with our relatives, we were taken by my sister-in-law to the hospital early the next morning. After I had spent some time with the surgeon, we were registered and assigned a room on the sixth floor. The surgeon informed me that he would perform the operation Tuesday at 3 pm, and that on Tuesday morning I would be going through the regular pre-operation routine.

A very unusual thing happened at the time of the operation. The week had been a very warm one, and the officials of Philadelphia were concerned about the possibility of an electric failure. After the operation, my wife told me that the power had failed while I was being operated on and that the emergency unit had been used. Another thing made the operation different. The surgeon had asked me if a couple of doctors who were studying eye surgery at the hospital could watch as he operated. He said that mine was an unusual type of eye surgery.

I did not feel or sleep well that first night. I had suffered a head cold about a week before the surgery, and all during the operation my nostrils were tightly closed and I was forced to breathe through my mouth. This caused no little discomfort, and I asked for something to relieve the condition. In addition, I thought that I was supposed to remain on my back all during the night. The next morning when I told the surgeon what I had done, he said that I could have slept on my right side.

I had never been in a hospital where one was received so graciously and made to feel so important, no matter who was doing the ministering. One evening a negro nurse came into my room and asked if there was anything she could do for me before I got into bed. I told her that she and the others were so kind and asked her why they were showing so much kindness. "Rev. Williams," she answered, "it is because all of us love you." Could any experience be any more wonderful? From the time that I entered the hospital until I left it to go home, I felt very much "at home." One could feel love and kindness being expressed by everyone.

I was in total darkness all day Wednesday, September 23. My wife and daughter were there to help me eat of the good food sent to me. All my needs were cared for, and I even had a friendly roommate -- what more could I ask for? I was never neglected. Then came the big day when the shield and bandages were taken from my eye.

As the bandages were taken from my eye on Thursday, September 24, I saw something blue, a very wonderful blue -- it was the coat of the surgeon. I thanked God. I could see again. The operation was a success. I will never forget the words of the surgeon and his negro assistant as they looked into my eye and said, "Beautiful, beautiful." Later I teased

my wife that she had never spoken words like that to me when she looked into my eyes, not even in the days when we were younger. To be in a state of almost total blindness and then to see again is an experience that cannot be explained.

Our son and his wife came to visit on Friday, September 25. We had a very happy time, as I had all my loved ones with me. Our son returned home that same day, and our daughter returned home to Montrose on Sunday. And just one week after I had entered the hospital, I was privileged to go home. Our son and his wife again made the long journey to take us home.

As I left the surgeon's office that day, I thanked him for what he had done. It was then that he said, "I did only what I could. God will bring the healing. You must go home now and wait for God to do it." I learned the real meaning of the Scripture "Wait... wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14).

I was able to see many things as we journeyed home. We had to pass through a tunnel at one place; on our way down, I did not even know we had come to it until I was told that we were already passing through. As we made the journey home, I sang the chorus

Praise ye the Lord, Hallelujah.

Praise ye the Lord, Hallelujah.

Praise ye the Lord, Hallelujah.

Praise ye the Lord.

I felt then and I still feel that I could never praise Him enough for what He had done for me.

I had been given temporary glasses. It was not until some weeks later that I went to the ophthalmologist in Williamsport, had my eye tested, and was given a prescription for new glasses. I was then able to do almost everything, even to drive our car. Because my eye diffused the lights on automobiles, however, I was confused at night and could not drive then.

Since the operation I have composed sermons in verse entitled "Fifteen Old Testament Questions and Our Answers." These I have mimeographed and made into a booklet. I still have a few copies of the booklet. I also write an article for The Montrose Independent under the general title "Beside the Still Waters." I have written twenty-three articles to date - that is, to June 25, 1973. The people like them very much.

In fact, one woman told me, "Your article is the first thing that I look for and read when *The Independent* arrives each Thursday."

WE are always busy and have helped God make our property one of the beauty spots in this part of Pennsylvania. In November of 1973 we will have our property paid in full. We are so very happy here because we are so busy. On April 7, 1973, I was seventy-four years of age. My dear mother lived to within a month of her ninety-sixth birthday and, God willing, I hope to live as long as my mother, or even longer.

My wife is younger than I, and both of us feel that God still

has much for us to do.²² I now close with a short poem that I have written.

*WE hope to view many more glorious sunsets,
As they shine so brightly in the west;
Before that Sunset that will come at our life's end,
That one that is to be more beautiful and the best.*

*Yet, until that day comes to both of us,
Here in our home at Sunset View;
We shall keep on working and loving each day,
For God still has many things for us to do.*

FOOTNOTES

1. Dickinson Seminary, the forerunner of Lycoming College, was a highschool-level institution sponsored by the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church "designed to afford a liberal education to females, and to qualify young men to enter a college course." Free public schooling was introduced by the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1834, but prior to World War II only larger towns had secondary schools that went beyond grade 8. In the days before family cars and public school transportation, rural students who wanted to continue their education had to board in town during the week. Such a system encouraged the development of private high schools that provided specialized academic and/or religious training along with dedicated teachers and house parents. Over the years the Methodist Church was connected with several such Pennsylvania institutions, and the Wyoming Conference of the United Methodist Church still maintains the Wyoming Seminary at Kingston, PA.

2. The Williams' retirement home in 1973 was in Susquehanna County, near Montrose, in the extreme northeast corner of Pennsylvania and within the Wyoming Conference of the United Methodist Church.

3. The mining boom town of Scotia no longer exists. Its ruins may be seen on the state game lands south of US 322 a few miles west of State College. The Scotia ME Church was a part of the Halfmoon Charge. Originally erected in Upper Scotia (Marysville) in 1882, the building was relocated to lower Scotia in 1900. When the congregation disbanded in the early 1920's, the building was torn down and the bell donated to the Stormstown church. When the old Stormstown church was struck by lightning and burned to the ground in 1943, the bell was salvaged and is presently at the home of a local resident. The Koch Funeral Home of State College owns a collection of pictures of old Scotia that, unfortunately, does not include the ME church, and it is not known whether any picture of the building exists.

4. The "Angel Factory" was the name given at many institutions to the dormitory that housed students preparing for the ministry. Officially designated Eveland Hall, in honor of Central Pennsylvania Conference member Rev. William Perry Eveland who was a former president of the seminary and a missionary bishop of the church [see the last article in this volume of THE CHRONICLE], the building stood on the site of the present gymnasium complex. It contained the heating plant for "Old Main" and was connected to it by a four-foot-tall underground conduit through which heating pipes, maintenance men and mischievous "angels" passed.

5. The Clearville Charge consisted of the current

Clearville and Stevens Chapel churches along with three churches that no longer exist within the denomination: the Shreves church, which was discontinued in 1990, and the Pleasant Union and Robinsonville churches, both of which suffered from decreasing memberships that dwindled into the single digits and ceased to be supplied about 1970.

6. The obituary of Rev. James Robert Williams appears on page 438 of the 1986 Conference Journal. He graduated from Dickinson Junior College (now Lycoming College) in 1947 and completed the Conference Course of Study at Wesley Seminary in 1966. While pastor of the Columbia Circuit, he was admitted to the hospital with a foot infection on March 10, 1986, and was operated on a few weeks later. He performed a wedding on April 12 and was planning to return to the pulpit on April 20, when he suffered a heart attack and passed away April 15, 1986, at the age of 59.

7. The Burnt Cabins Charge was comprised of Burnt Cabins, Fannetsburg, Metal, Neelyton and Shade Gap; only the Burnt Cabins church exists today as served by Rev. Oren Williams. The Metal and Fannetsburg churches were discontinued in 1971 and 1973 respectively. The former church building still stands in good repair and is maintained by the cemetery association, while the structure of the latter congregation, sold to a private party in 1978, is in disrepair. The Neelyton and Shade Gap congregations merged in 1972 to erect the new St. Luke's United Methodist Church on the outskirts of Shade Gap. The former church buildings were sold and are now used for storage and a recreation center respectively.

8. The Rays Hill Charge, renamed Breezewood in 1974, consisted of the Akersville, Asbury, Breezewood, McKendree, Providence and Wesley Chapel churches. The Asbury and Providence congregations gradually declined in the 1950's and 60's and each of them is listed as bringing zero members into the 1968 union that formed the United Methodist Church. The Asbury building was finally sold in 1991; the Providence building was apparently never fully owned by the Methodists and is now a community church. The Akersville church was discontinued in 1972. Breezewood, McKendree and Wesley Chapel constitute the current charge.

9. Mrs. Doyle Thomas, nee Eleanor Louise Williams, is now retired and continues to live in Montrose.

10. This refers to the Allison Memorial Church that was built in 1892 and stood at the southwest corner of West and High Street. It is hard to imagine a large church building occupying the small open area there now. The fire occurred January 20, 1954, and the congregation worshipped in Dickinson College's Bosler Hall until the completion of their present building on Mooreland Avenue.

11. By this time, 1931, Dickinson Seminary had begun to offer post-secondary classes similar to today's community

college and/or continuing/adult education courses. In 1935 the institution officially became Dickinson Junior College, the first junior college in Pennsylvania. In 1947 the school instituted a four-year program and, because there was already a Dickinson College in Carlisle, was named Lycoming College.

12. The Allenwood congregation was disbanded about the time of the 1968 denominational merger and never entered the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. The building is currently being remodeled into a dwelling. The remaining churches formed a two-point charge until 1977. At that time Elimsport was connected with nearby St. John's, a former EUB congregation, and Maple Hill was supplied separately until eventually being connected with the Montgomery church.

13. The Lock Haven Circuit consisted of Dunnstown, Fairpoint, Liberty, Pine Station and McElhattan. There was also a Lock Haven Circuit in the EUB denomination, and after the 1968 merger both charges were reorganized. In 1975 both Pine Station and the former McElhattan EUB congregation were merged into the McElhattan church; it is now on a charge with Charlton and Caldwell, a former EUB church. The Fairpoint church was closed in 1984. Dunnstown and Liberty are presently on a charge with Swissdale, another former EUB church in the area.

14. The four churches formed a line that extended northwest from the parsonage at Fayetteville and included (in geographic order) Fayetteville, Green Village, Upper Strasburg and Roxbury. The parsonage was originally, in 1875, in Green Village, a once-prominent town at the intersection of PA 997 and US 11 and nearer the center of the charge. In 1917 the location of the parsonage was changed to Fayetteville; even though it represented the southernmost point of the circuit, it was on US 30 and had become the most promising town on the charge. Of the four congregations served by Rev. Oren Williams, only the one in Fayetteville, which erected a new building outside town in 1964 and is now named Calvary United Methodist, remains. Following the 1939 merger, the Roxbury congregation merged into the former Methodist Protestant church there; only the cemetery remains to mark the location of the former ME church. Following the 1968 merger, the Upper Strasburg congregation merged into the former EUB church there; the former ME building at the edge of town is now maintained by the cemetery association. The church at Green Village, once the hub of the charge, declined along with the town and closed in 1944. Eight years later the church was reopened with assistance from St. Paul's in Chambersburg. Despite an attendance of 350 at the reopening service, the membership never rose above 9 and the church closed permanently a short time later. The building was torn down and the contents of the cornerstone, which included a July 23, 1873, copy of the *Valley Spirit* newspaper, were placed in the

Conference Archives. A small cemetery remains.

15. The Muncy Valley Charge consisted of Fairview, Hemlock Creek, Muncy Valley, Richart's Grove, Strawbridge, Sonestown and Talmar Wesley Chapel. The 1968 denominational merger, the presence of several EUB churches in the area, and a desire to eliminate circuits with so many churches all contributed to a 1969 reorganization of the charge. The Muncy Valley, Sonestown and former Sonestown EUB churches merged to form the Valley United Methodist Church and erect a new building. The Valley and Hemlock congregations are now on a charge with St. Paul's, another former EUB church. Richart's Grove ceased to appear in the Conference Journal in 1970 and is now a small community church. The Strawbridge church is now on the picture Rocks Charge. The Fairview and Talmar Wesley Chapel churches are now on the Unityville Charge.

16. The six churches on the former Bloomingdale Charge were split into two appointments in 1966. Bloomingdale, Hunlock Creek and Oakdale became the Hunlock Creek Charge; Harmony, McKendree and Muhlenburg became the Muhlenburg Charge. The Harmony congregation was discontinued in 1971, and the building is now a private residence. In 1980, the appointments achieved their present configuration when Oakdale moved from the Hunlock Creek to the Muhlenburg charge.

17. The reorganization following the 1968 merger to form the United Methodist Church placed Barnesboro, located in the northwest corner of Cambria County, within the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

18. The charge included the congregations at Centralia and Helfenstein and was situated in the region where Columbia, Schuylkill and Northumberland counties come together. The reorganization following the 1968 merger to form the United Methodist Church placed the Centralia Charge in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference.

19. The Ulster-Milan charge in Bradford County is the extreme northeast charge of the Conference. Along with the Robertsdale Charge, it is one of only two charges served by Rev. Oren Williams that exist today in the Central Pennsylvania Conference in the same form as the charge that he served.

20. The Robertsdale Charge consists of Broadtop City, Cooks, Woodvale and Robertsdale. Along with the Ulster Charge, it is one of only two charges served by Rev. Oren Williams that exist today in the Central Pennsylvania Conference in the same form as the charge that he served. Cooks Church has the distinction of being the only former Methodist Protestant congregation in the Eastern Conference of that denomination to join in the 1939 merger. [All Pennsylvania MP churches in that denomination's Maryland Conference -- mostly in the extreme southern portion of the state, but including a few churches as far north as Roxbury (see footnote 14) -- participated in the merger.] A part of

the MP's Cassville charge, the congregation apparently remained undecided for some time and they are not listed in the Conference Journal until after 1945, at which time the Conference officially received the deed to the building. During the pastorate of Rev. Williams, Cooks church had about ten members.

21. The General Conference of 1962 extended the northern and southern boundaries of the Central Pennsylvania Conference to coincide with the state lines. The Ulster-Milan Charge was one of several charges transferred in from the Central New York Conference. Other northern-tier charges to the west were transferred in to the Central Pennsylvania Conference from the Genesee Conference, and several charges in the southern portion of the state were transferred in from the Baltimore Conference.

22. Oren and Helen Williams left their retirement home in Sunset View and moved into Cottage #7 at the Lewisburg Home on September 16, 1975, where they both continued to serve their Lord in any way they could. Rev. Williams preached in Mifflinburg on Sunday, August 22, 1976. The following day he entered the Evangelical Community Hospital with a heart attack. He was discharged at noon on September 7 and readmitted at 5 pm on the next day. At 7:20 am on September 9, 1976, Oren Ray Williams passed peacefully into the presence of the First Member of WE. Helen Hoy Williams returned to Montrose to live near her daughter and, God willing, will celebrate her 90th birthday on July 17, 1992.

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT: Jesus indicated that Christians would be known by their fruits. Rev. Oren Ray Williams, with the help and encouragement of his wife Helen, graduated from Williamsport Dickinson Seminary and was ordained in the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

Their son, Rev. James Robert Williams, graduated from Williamsport Dickinson Junior College and was ordained in the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

Their grandson, Rev. James Oren Williams (son of Rev. J.R. Williams), graduated from Lycoming College and was ordained in the Central Pennsylvania. He now serves Grace United Methodist Church in South Williamsport.

Their great-grandson, Jason Joseph Moyer (son of Nancy June Williams Moyer, grandson of Rev. J.R. Williams) is currently a senior honor student at Lycoming College with a triple major in German, Religion and Near Eastern Studies. He recently won honorable mention in *USA Today's* Annual "All USA College Academic Team." In addition, the editor wishes to thank Jason for serving as the final proofreader for THE CHRONICLE'S rendition of his great-grandfather's manuscript.

APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF EACH CHARGE

Many things have changed since Oren and Helen Williams served their fifteen charges: names of the charges, number of churches per charge, and removal of charges to other Conferences. The chart below gives the order of the charges, and the name and number of churches on each charge, as Rev. and Mrs. Williams served them.

