

A TRIBUTE TO HOMER STOCKWELL (1921-2009)

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." - Poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson

Few and far between are the men like Homer Stockwell, our late, much-beloved church leader. I knew this the moment I met him — a man you felt you should call “Mr. Stockwell” who would insist on “just Homer,” instead; he with his warm smile and discerning observations. How much we will all miss him!



Over more than sixty years, Homer led this church through untold important developments and over more than a few rocky seas. Members relied upon his wisdom and even-handedness no matter what the occasion. It is clear that every bit of this regard was well-earned. I never saw Homer treat anyone as beneath himself. No matter with whom he spoke, Homer lived out the Great Commandment with authentic Spirit and drew each person into the optimistic, “can-do” frame of reference that perpetually grounded him. How comfortably Homer’s countenance recalled the aura of the “gentleman farmer” that fit that creative group of our nation’s Founding Fathers.

In every age, men of integrity are considered to be a rare find. So, too, was Homer. His son, David, emphasized this point by telling me about Homer as a parental disciplinarian. Though not directly acknowledged, it seems Homer preferred to use a method of calling his children to account for questionable actions that actually goes back to the great philosopher, Socrates — his “elenctic mode of inquiry,” in which an adult pursues, say, the subject of justice by guiding a dialogue designed to reveal a learner’s contradictions or inconsistencies in thinking or behavior. No screaming, yelling or threatening — just a rigorous trip on the rails of pure logic. Compassionately at work, whether as a parent, civic leader or church member, that was Homer’s resolutely even-handed, mathematical mind, schooled by the church, on the farm, at William Jewel College and in the Navy.

To the end, the sheer number of Homer’s friends was dazzling. They wrote, phoned and prayed for him in his illness; poured into his hospital room with fond memories. This man who many times told me that a week never starts out right if it doesn’t start out with worship was so loved and respected. Even when absent, you could still feel his animating presence in our classrooms, sanctuary and Fellowship Hall, where he spent so much time. And Homer, too, felt the presence of memorable saints at church. His wife, Vivian, often spoke about how much Homer missed his great friend, Jack Spotts — their immediate simpatico, their long conversations and fishing trips.

We shall never forget: Homer was a remarkable friend and family member; a true disciple, a “man’s man,” and a saint worth emulating. For creating this beautiful man and for sharing him with us for a good, long time, we do praise God.

Pastor Lee