

THE EULOGY

In celebration of the Completed Life of
WILBUR JOHNSTON LEATHERMAN

Our family has been experiencing the healing and sense of victory which does come when we celebrate the life of a very special person like my father. The victory comes when we realize how straight and true has been his path of service throughout his entire journey. If there is one image that represents his sense of calling, it is that of the humble servant. He called himself a chauffer. He talked about oiling the machinery of the church to make it work. He did whatever the situation called for. He made me realize the vast difference between self-denial and actively performing service for those around him. It was so typical for him to insist on stuffing his car completely full of apples and making one more trip to Chicago before entering the hospital for his bladder operation.

But as I look down that path that took Wilbur Leatherman to many communities and into many forms of service, there are other images that tell us of the very high quality of that journey.

He always held up the highest standards possible. I remember the many discussions at report card time about the one B in the midst of A's, O's and E's. "Yes, Father, I will see what can be done to improve that mark," we would reply.

Dad's sense of obedience and quality was not without humor. Our favorite family expression which was pronounced often just before annual conference was: "When the Bishop says frog, we jump."

We were fortunate to have lived through some difficult times. We so enjoyed and looked forward to the sharing of food during holiday seasons. Dad often said, "We cast our bread out on the water and it comes back in sandwiches. He was very open to the miracles of everyday life.

Probably the most enjoyable and satisfying aspect of the church for him was experienced through the symbols of worship. He took particular delight in explaining stain glass window images as well as the symbols envolved with every aspect of church furniture and architecture. He was always looking for new ways to celebrate communion. He would make special trips to Madison just to look for a special bulletin cover or some authentic Jewish unleavened bread.

Dad's sense of high adventure came with the challenges of ecumenicity. Hwas always active in gathering together as many pastors as possible in every place where he lived. His favorite story originated in 1937, in the small town of Redfield, Iowa. There he was able to persuade Father Liguti to speak at a special church event as long as they didn't call it a worship service.

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The global dimension of Dad's concern was expressed in his involvement in the Ecumenical Institute. One of the most impressive feats of his retirement came about when he volunteered to chauffeur five young men from India and Asia around the Midwest in less than one week. These men barely knew English and had been in the States less than one month. Most of that time had been spent in the confines of the Kemper Building in Chicago. You would have to know that both Dad and his car had already put on over the limit of recommended mileage for any normal vehicle. Each leg of the trip was at least ten hours of driving: from Chicago to Minneapolis to Cannonball, North Dakota, to Lorimor Iowa and back to Chicago. Later Dad was overwhelmed by a simple ceremony by the boys when they presented a leather briefcase and knelt at his feet for "Baba's" blessing.

Dad's high sense of churchmanship did not limit his direction of service. He brought in every aspect of life into his ministry. He was a pioneer in many aspects of faith. He organized the first all-night party for my Junior Prom which was held in the basement of the Methodist Church in Brodhead. Folk singing and dancing were used as mixers whenever possible. His early work with history and heritage often took us on Sunday afternoon drives to discover new vistas and historical markers. They found their way back into sermons and special celebrations, such as cornerstone events.

Perhaps the demonstration which summarizes all the best qualities of this life is that the three daughters of Wilbur Leatherman are all working their fool heads off in three different religious organizations, doing what the situation requires, to bring the Kingdom a little closer. We are there because we were shown the way. We have all of you to thank because you have all participated in this unique life. Please join our family as we praise God for this truly exemplary servant.

Sonja Van Dusseldorp