

LOCALLY ADMIRER AND NATIONALLY IMPORTANT: DR. HAROLD MARTIN

The Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC) of Second Presbyterian Church met in early May of 1930 to propose the name of Harold R. Martin of Gary, Indiana to the Session. The resignation of the Rev. Charles Baillie had occurred over a year before when he had been called to Fullerton Presbyterian in Chicago, and when he had expressed his regret that he had not been more successful in “lifting the spiritual values” of Second Pres congregants. The PNC had diligently been looking for a new pastor to bring renewal and growth, and a motivator who would also increase monetary pledges for “missions and benevolences.” When Martin accepted the call to Second Pres, in the words of esteemed Clerk and historian Roy Ramseyer, the Committee “had chosen even better than it knew.”

Martin preached his first sermon at the Bloomington church on May 18, 1930, entitled “Let Us Rise Up and Build”, while speaking of “creative religion” and urging the membership to give earnest support to vital programs. By 1932, he had received an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree, and was thereafter fondly known to parishioners as “Doc” Martin, and his wife Alice and their children had been warmly incorporated into the Second Pres family. His emphasis during each phase of any new extension of church activity was consistently on UTILIZING PRAYER while seeking out youth and increasing attention to missions. When approached in his office by members seeking information, counseling, or action on any issue, Doc often said, “Let’s get on our knees right now and pray about it!”

Dr. Harold Martin served as senior pastor and head of staff at Second Presbyterian Church for a total of 32 years. By the time he retired, he had become known locally as a beloved leader, a “spiritual arouser”, as well as a figure of national importance. In 1957, he was elected Moderator of the Presbyterian Church U.S. A. As Moderator, he played a major role in the merger of the denomination with the United Presbyterian Church; he also made several international visits representing Presbyterians worldwide.

During Dr. Martin’s tenure at his home church in Bloomington, a number of “stepping stones to Christian service” were instituted at the church, including prayer groups—23 independent groups met between the years 1934 and 1962. Youth choirs started in 1937 under the direction of Mary Jane Carothers, and eventually developed into nine different choirs incorporating all ages from 4 years of age to senior adults. Youth camps were started in 1938 and involved several hundred youth at summer camps located at Lake Bloomington, IL and Lake Geneva, WI, along with many adult volunteers who served as leaders and counselors. During the years of Dr. Martin’s leadership, over 20 young people were sent into fulltime Christian service and were located in various sites around in world. The sanctuary and church building, originally built in 1896, were reconfigured and remodeled in 1939 and a new Christian Education

building was built in 1955-56, fully supported and paid for by 1962. By the time of Doc's retirement in the fall of 1962, church membership had increased to over 2000 youth and adults.

During 2020-2022, the Heritage Committee of Second Presbyterian Church compiled many materials from Dr. Harold Martin's years of service into an organized box file now available to interested parties. Included are some personal letters as well as documentary evidence and insights into the 3 decades of Doc's ministry. A file titled "Overview" prepared by longtime church member Elizabeth Abraham for a "Who's Who" publication is there, along with the following series of documents:

Series I. Biographical materials for Dr. Martin, including funeral documents

Series II. Papers of Dr. Martin, Call to Pastorate, Bulletins and Activities

Series III. Materials related to Term of Office as Moderator of General Assembly

Series IV. International Travel of Moderator Harold R. Martin

Series V. Letters (originals) from and to Dr. Martin, 1930-1980; sermons delivered and published writings

Series VI. Photographs including Dr. Martin and people of the church and this community; included are photo shoot images from McCall' magazine article on Second Pres church (1950)

As additional materials are found and donated, this filebox is being consistently updated by Heritage Committee volunteers.

In a pamphlet prepared by the Presbytery of Great Rivers prior to Dr. Martin's election as Moderator, Doc's contributions to the church were summed up in these words: "The spirit of prayer, coupled with sincere humility has pervaded the life of Harold R. Martin." They then added, "The secret power found in Second Presbyterian Church may be found in the way that God has used this man."

(Note: An Addendum to this article entitled "A Personal Viewpoint" is available.)