



Remembering Dr. George Weaver

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This past week I was reminded of my first year in seminary. Our friends in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ marked “this day in history” and recognized the life and work of Dr. George Weaver. It was fifteen years ago that Dr. Weaver entered into his heavenly home (February 15, 2002). It’s hard to believe that it’s been fifteen years. Weaver had served as a pastor with the United Brethren and ultimately served as their senior bishop from 1969 to 1977. It was in 1977 that he was called to serve as the President of Winebrenner Theological Seminary (WTS). Dr. Weaver stepped down from his role as president in 1988 but continued to teach at WTS until 1992.

I started my studies at WTS in the fall of 1992 and had Dr. Weaver as an instructor for two of my first courses, the last two he would teach at the seminary. I’ve always cherished the fact that I got to take a couple of courses with Dr. Weaver.

Dr. Weaver helped change the trajectory of WTS. There were serious challenges at WTS when he arrived. The seminary had moved away from the denomination theologically. There were a number of pastors who chose other institutions during this period of time because of WTS’ reputation for being too liberal. Under Dr. Weaver’s leadership, he brought the seminary back to its theological origins with a strong commitment to Scripture and fiercely determined leadership. I understand that those were not pleasant or easy days, but he led the charge to bring the seminary back to its original mission and values. I’m grateful for his determination and grit

He had an amazing ability to ask the most piercing and insightful questions. In both courses that I took with him we were required to journal throughout the semester. While I didn’t always enjoy it (the journaling process or his piercing questions), he seemed to always find a way to drive right at the heart of the important matters I needed to face in my preparation and challenged me to look deeper or dig further to find answers and solutions. I’m grateful for his insights and his willingness to make me uncomfortable.

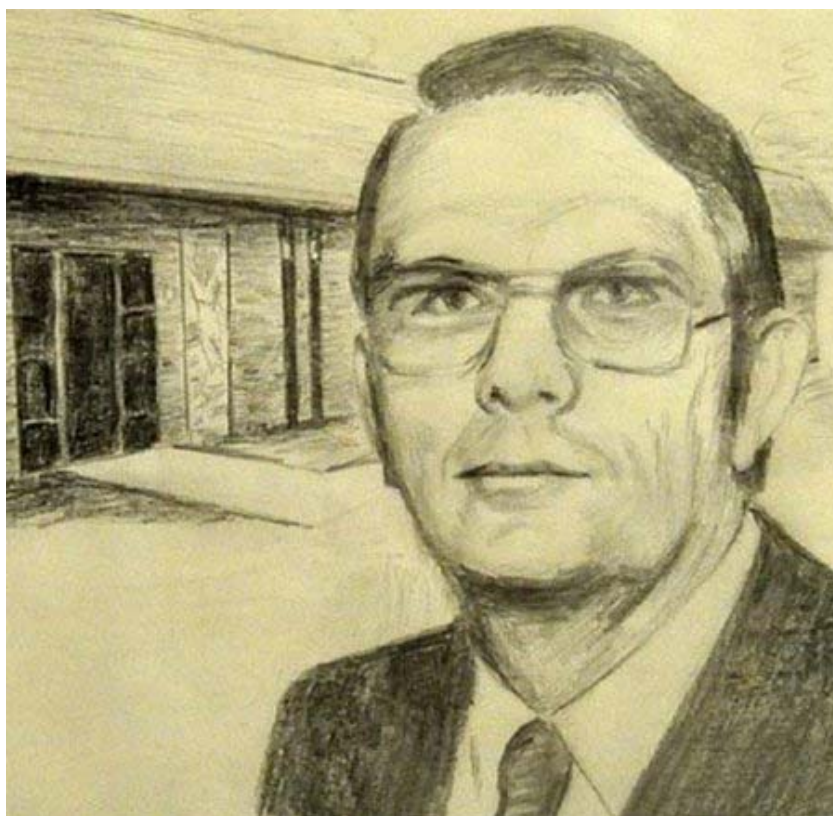
He loved his wife Bette Mae dearly. I don’t know if I actually ever had the privilege of meeting Bette Mae as my memory seems to recall that she was unable to get out much during their final years at WTS (I know other WTS graduates can tell many stories about their years at WTS and her involvement in the seminary community). You didn’t have to be around Dr. Weaver for very long before you started

hearing about Bette Mae. He loved her dearly and it showed. Bette Mae passed away about a year before George and I remember we all had the sense that he wouldn't last long without his beloved Bette Mae by his side. I'm grateful for his example of loving his spouse to the very end.

WTS celebrates 75 years of ministry this year. Dr. Weaver provided leadership during a critical moment in the life of the institution. There are many of us today across the body of the church who were impacted by his life and ministry. I think it's safe to suggest that Winebrenner Seminary might not exist today if it had not been for Dr. Weaver and his leadership through such difficult years. I'm grateful for his life and the investment he made in my life and ministry.

The picture and narrative below is republished from the UB Central (with thanks to Steve Dennie who authored the piece and granted permission for use in this publication).

Christ's Peace,
Lance



George Weaver, the senior bishop 1969-1977, passed away on February 15, 2002. Over the years, he had weathered a series of heart attacks and cardiac operations.

Weaver was known as a strong, even imposing bishop—a man who got things done, a leader. He was gifted in preaching, administration, and writing. Those privileged to know him at the personal level saw a man of warmth, compassion, and wisdom.

George Weaver was born in 1927 in McCloud, Calif. He was only a couple years old when his mother died. Just after George's fifth birthday, his father left him and younger brother Rolland with Morris and Maud Weaver. He told them, "George and Rolland, this is your new daddy and mother." And that's the last George Weaver saw his biological father.

The Weavers owned a ranch outside of Pixley. A few weeks after George and Rolland arrived, the place burned down—the home, sheds, equipment—everything. Within a month, the family had been forced into a migrant worker existence, harvesting fruit, vegetables, and cotton in California and Oregon. George worked the fields with his parents.

After three years of this, Morris began tending an orange grove in Porterville, near Pixley. The family lived in two tents with wood floors, electric lights, and water carried from an irrigation canal. In 1939, the family moved back to Pixley. “It was the first time in seven years that we did not live in a tent,” George recalled.

It was not a happy or secure childhood. However, in 1943 he became a Christian at the Pixley United Brethren church and began thinking about becoming a preacher. Just before his 18th birthday he joined the Navy to become a pilot, but World War 2 ended just as he was finishing boot camp, and he was discharged in 1946.

He headed off to Huntington College in 1947, married a classmate from Chambersburg, Pa., and in 1950 accepted a student pastorate in Decatur, Ind. Other pastorates followed—in Kansas, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. He was editor of the denominational magazine for two years, 1957-1959, and then began ten years as pastor of Otterbein UB church in Waynesboro, Pa.

In 1969, General Conference elected three new bishops, and Weaver became the senior bishop. He served eight years in that role. Major accomplishments include merger three conferences into what became Central Conference, establishing Camp Cotubic, and building a new UB Headquarters building.

Weaver wrote frankly about those years.

“I remember giving more time and energy to accomplishing the business of the church than being engaged in its mission. ‘Administrator’ is the most accurate description of my tenure as bishop. There was a raging inner tension between my vision of the bishopric and what seemed to be the reality of administering the program and business of the church. There were matters that culminated in an endless progression of decisions. I did not like having to make them, and others did not like their outcome....Many viewed me as caring more for the process than for persons—both the mark and the curse of the administrator....Realization set in that I would be unable to do all that I had envisioned to accomplish.”

In 1977, Weaver became president of Winebrenner Theological Seminary in Findlay, Ohio. The seminary prospered under his leadership. He stepped down as president in 1988, but continued teaching until 1992. Then he and Bette retired in Cincinnati.