Concept & Commitment author fulfills life of purpose

Growing up in Spring Arbor, Mich., Howard Snyder HS '58, JC '60 never considered attending any other college. And when he was asked to pen the history of Spring Arbor in 1962, he agreed without hesitation. “My family and I were on six-months furlough from missionary service in Brazil and living in Spring Arbor. I was asked to write the Spring Arbor Junior College centennial history. It was my first book,” says Snyder, who has just completed five years of service as professor of Wesley studies, at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.

When Spring Arbor became a university, then president Gayle Beebe asked Snyder to update the history. “I enjoyed doing so, and completely rewrote the earlier book as well as adding new chapters,” says Snyder. The latest book, Concept and Commitment: A History of Spring Arbor University, 1873-2007, was published in 2008.

While he has a love for history and writing, neither of those identify the real purpose in Snyder’s life. “From the time of my mid-high-school years, I felt a call to full-time Christian ministry, and assumed that would be overseas missionary service,” says Snyder, who was born in the Dominican Republic where his parents, Edmund and Clara (Zahniser) Snyder, served as Free Methodist missionaries.

From the age of four, Snyder grew up in Spring Arbor where his father taught at Spring Arbor Junior College from 1944 to 1953. As a student, Snyder edited The Re-Dit (forerunner to The Crusader) during his freshman year, and was student body president the next year; he also participated in A Cappella and debate.

A part of that purposeful vision was manifested in Snyder as a Spring Arbor student where he received reaffirmation of his Christian faith, openness to all truth, and a vital and engaging campus community life. “The most moving experience was probably the revival that broke out in chapel in February 1957. It was spontaneous. Verdon Dunckel was then the pastor, and he helped shepherd the movement of the Spirit,” says Snyder, who served as pastor and seminary professor in São Paulo, Brazil, with the Free Methodist Church from 1968 to 1975.

Snyder went on to earn degrees from Greenville College and Asbury Theological Seminary. He also earned the doctorate in historical theology at the University of Notre Dame in 1983, completing a dissertation on church renewal movements.

He pastored the Detroit Redford Free Methodist Church for two years. Snyder developed a deep interest in the church and in renewal movements during seminary, his time as pastor at the Detroit Redford Free Methodist Church, and his ministry in Brazil.

While his career has taken him around the world as a missionary, speaker, professor and writer, his focus continues to be grounded by intentional service. “Today, my purpose is to live a life of faithful discipleship and help people catch a vision for the full coming of the Kingdom of God...”

Snyder continues to serve as a life trustee on Spring Arbor University’s board of trustees. He has also written several books including The Problem with Wineskins, and is a contributing editor at Christianity Today. He also edits the Free Methodist Historical Society Newsletter and formerly edited Revitalization, the bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements at Asbury Seminary, which he helped found.

Snyder is an ordained elder in the Ohio Conference of the Free Methodist Church. He and his wife Janice (JC 1960-61), a Roberts Wesleyan College nursing graduate, have four grown children (Mark ’87, Jerilyn Winstead, Howard, and Jonathan ’94), all married, and 13 grandchildren.

Susan Panak ’10, SAU head archivist, continues to accept, organize and make available primary resources of lasting importance donated by alumni and others. If you have items to donate, contact Susan at 517.750.6434 or spanak@arbor.edu.

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