

Open to Dialogue and Mutual Enrichment in a Pluralistic World

Dick was not the kind of pastor who hung up his cap and gown upon graduation from seminary. He kept studying and learning and he encouraged his congregation to join him on that path. As Dick wrestled with timeless questions, reading the works of both late and living theologians, he often sermonized on those questions.

The preaching eventually attracted attention in the local community and then in western Michigan and the day came when Dick was featured on the front page of the New York Times. Our little church in sleepy Spring Lake began to host some of the foremost theologians of our times: author Marcus Borg, Jesus Movement co-founder John Dominic Crossan, New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine, former Anglican Bishop of Durham N. Thomas Wright, former Bishop of Stockholm the late Krister Stendahl, world-renowned world religions scholar Huston Smith and best-selling author Bishop John Shelby Spong have all traveled to Spring Lake to lecture and, often, to serve as celebrant for Sunday services.

Dick reached out to other Christian denominations. A warm relationship was formed with St. Mary's Catholic parish in the next block. The two communities gathered on special occasions and Dick and the priests at St. Mary's shared various services and celebrations.

Dick is also remembered as a leader in the Jewish-Christian dialogue committee and developed a close relationship with Muskegon's Temple B'nai Israel's rabbi Alan Alpert. Dick was a guest of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem and Rabbi Donniel Hartman preached at Christ Community. In all of these inter-relationships, the respective communities were drawn together and enjoyed a real sense of community.

One of Dick's favorite hymn verses comes from the pen of Alfred Lord Tennyson:

*Our little systems have their day
They have their day and cease to be
They are but broken lights of Thee
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.*

Dick lived this philosophy. He sought the truth beyond the rituals and liturgies. He never claimed to have found the truth, rather, he followed where the truth led, come what may.

The force on Dick's uncompromising character is another reason

Christ Community was "an alternative to church as usual".

Charles E. Lehnert, former member of CCC