



REV. RON FAY (71)

Reverend Ron Fay, director of church relations, has led a life of pastoral ministry within the body of Christ. He says he has been able to use his strengths to serve others, and likewise has received guidance, love, and grace from many.

While attending Pasadena College, he was impacted by professors and mentors who expressed excitement for their vocations. One such professor was Dr. Fordyce Bennett, then professor of English literature and one of the main reasons Fay chose literature as his field of study. (The other reason was a young woman named Helyn Sammon (72), whose intelligence and kindness enamored him so much that he later asked her to marry him.) Dr. Reuben Welch, who was chaplain at the time, also profoundly influenced Fay through his passion for Scripture.

Those relationships and experiences led to a pivotal moment during Fay's undergraduate career, in which he found himself called to give his life to Christ and ministry.

While still attending Pasadena College, Fay became a youth pastor at Long Beach Bixby Knolls Church of the Nazarene, where he became aware he had a significant limitation—he couldn't sing. Every year during Easter week, youth groups would travel as choirs to sing for other communities. Fay wanted to live out his calling as a youth pastor, but didn't know how that was possible if he wasn't able to sing.

God soon used Fay's lack of musical ability to create a significant program for His kingdom. Instead of traveling with the youth group as a choir, his pastor, Dr. Tom Goble, suggested Fay take his group to a Native American reservation in Needles, Calif., to help a pastor paint a parsonage he had built. Fay's youth group raised the funds for materials and went during Easter week to serve and minister.

This experience led to one of the most far-reaching accomplishments in Fay's career: Project Y.E.S. (Youth Equipped to Serve). It expanded over the years, allowing youth to work alongside Native American men and women building and painting homes and churches while simultaneously building relationships and influencing a significant number of lives. At one point, Project Y.E.S. had 55 teams with 880 participants traveling to different churches from Mexico to New Mexico and all over Arizona. It lasted for 25 years with over 6,000 participants.

As a pastor, it eventually became exhausting for Fay to travel while managing other Easter week responsibilities. That's when Fay asked PLNU to take over Project Y.E.S. Dr. Norm Shoemaker, founding director of PLNU's Center of Pastoral Leadership, and at the time executive director of the Office of Spiritual Development, then organized and expanded the program.

Eventually, Shoemaker was called to serve as the senior pastor at San Diego First Church, and Dr. Dana Walling transitioned to Shoemaker's vacant campus ministry position. As the leadership talked about who could fill Walling's role,

Fay came to mind, but since Fay was on sabbatical nobody could reach him. As amazing as it sounds, Fay walked right by them at the exact moment Walling and then President Jim Bond were talking about him. He just happened to be on campus so his daughter could preview PLNU.

Soon after, the Fays each took a position at PLNU.

Fay's role at PLNU is in church relations. He is the representative of the university to Nazarene churches, organizer of the annual Pastors and Leaders Conference (PALCON), originator of PLNU's Nazarene Night at Disneyland, and key developer of Vacation by the Sea, also known as Loma Ocean View Escapes (LOVE for Pastors). Fay also determines ways PLNU can help resource churches. He leads a program that has recycled 1,100 computers to churches. Additionally, Fay sends churches chairs and other furnishings for which the university no longer has need.

"The truth of the matter is this: Ron looks for ways to help," said Shoemaker. "While he speaks often in churches, he is generally not on the platform up front, but behind a table at the back—which is right where Ron incarnates an authentic expression of Christian servanthood."

Fay has seen God's hand on his life most significantly during his marriage with Helyn. After a long journey battling cancer, which she and Fay walked together, Helyn passed away in 2004.

"God sustained us both," Fay said. "She knew she was dying and had confidence that it was going to be okay. That's probably the most significant manifestation of God's grace, mercy, and strength that I've ever experienced. I was exhausted taking care of her, but somehow I was able to keep doing it. We took care of her. It was an amazing time of knowing God's presence. That's probably where I've seen His work the most."

"I witnessed his faith, which was tried by fire," said Dr. Tim Hall, associate professor of psychology, head women's soccer coach, and close friend of Fay's. "I was profoundly touched during this season of Ron's life with the loyalty and faithfulness in which he lived. He taught me so much."

Fay also recognizes the role Christian community has played in his life.

"And [I experienced God's presences] also through people in the body of Christ—through my Sunday school teachers when I was a kid, through people who had confidence in me, and through people who have gone through tremendous trials themselves and maintained faith," Fay said. "Through the body of Christ, I've had wonderful experiences of His sustaining power and love."

Throughout his 20 years at PLNU, Fay has significantly impacted the university and the people with whom he's formed relationships. He continues to live his life by constantly laying it down for others and allowing for God's power to be made perfect in weakness.

Fay is now re-married to Carol, "a remarkable person" who makes him feel twice blessed. He and Carol plan on retiring in January in Prescott, Ariz., a mountainous area above Phoenix, where they will be close to most of their 12 grandchildren.

DR. MICHAEL MCCONNELL (71)

Dr. Mike McConnell grew up in a small town in California, where everyone (including employees of the local fire station) knew his name.

"I was often into mischief," McConnell laughed. "But I had parents who were deeply religious. They brought me early on into a small Nazarene church filled with other people who were also deeply religious—people who saw it as their responsibility to not only raise their own kids, but to help raise the kids of their friends as well."

McConnell benefited from the steady positive influence of pastors and Sunday school teachers in his church who cared for him and pointed him in the right direction. After he graduated from high school, he attended Pasadena College, where he continued to enjoy fellowship with people who shared similar values and beliefs.

At Pasadena College, McConnell took numerous math and chemistry courses taught by Drs. Sheldon Sickler, Val Christensen, and Vic Heasley, three excellent professors who were all excited about their subject matter (it was Heasley who first got McConnell hooked on scientific research). Toward the end of his junior year, McConnell took a general biology course from Dr. Glenn Keys and liked it so much that he crammed four more upper-division biology courses into his senior year. Psychology professor Dr. Paul Culbertson was also important to McConnell, not only because of his strong teaching abilities, but also because he assigned McConnell a classroom seat next to Kathryn Lunning (70), the woman McConnell would later marry and who now serves as the dean of arts and sciences at PLNU.

After graduating and getting married, he and Kathryn moved to Boston where McConnell began studying molecular biology at Tufts University, eventually earning his Ph.D. in 1976. He then went on to a postdoctoral research assignment at Harvard Medical School, where he studied Rous sarcoma virus (RSV, an oncovirus that causes cancer) for two years with Dr. Peter Bloomberg. There, McConnell realized he was probably best suited for a university environment where both teaching and research would be valued. In 1978, he and Kathryn made the move to PLNU, where McConnell accepted a joint faculty appointment in the Departments of Biology and Chemistry.

There was already a well-established chemistry undergraduate summer research program when McConnell came to PLNU, and he wanted to begin one for biology. Fortunately, Research Associates, an alumni auxiliary formed in 1977 for the purpose of sustaining the chemistry summer research program, helped by providing stipends for several students to work with McConnell in the summer of 1979. Biology colleague Dr. David Brown also directed researchers that first summer and for several years thereafter. Since then, with much guidance and leadership from McConnell, the biology summer research program has grown to an average of approximately 50 students and 10 faculty conducting research each summer with nearly 400 students in total over the years.

McConnell has served as the chair of the Department of Biology, was a member of the faculty council, and helped expand PLNU's involvement with the West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference (WCBSURC). The WCBSURC was founded by Santa Clara University in 1976, and professor of biology Dr. Ken Hyde sent several students there to give presentations. In 1983, McConnell began taking students to the conference on a regular basis, and after nine years of continuous participation, PLNU was invited to host the WCBSURC for the first time in 1992.

With help from biology department faculty and administrative assistant LeAnne Elizondo, McConnell has worked to make PLNU a major player in the WCBSURC, resulting in increased national recognition for the university. Elizondo has also worked with McConnell in recent years to organize and administer PLNU's Perspectives on Science lecture and dinner series, a community outreach program for San Diego County science teachers, initially founded in 1998 by professor emeritus of biology Dr. Darrel Falk.



McConnell's influence on students has been remarkable. He has taught nearly 1,100 science majors, approximately half of whom have gone on to earn advanced degrees in science or medicine. When asked about McConnell, one of the characteristics students mention most often is his passion.

"Dr. McConnell has a great enthusiasm for what he does, and it is infectious," shared alumnus Josh Haleen (05).

"He always seems to be filled with childlike wonder at the things God does and the way He loves us," said another former student, Jeff Youngren (06). "I have very fond memories of him explaining a chemical pathway in the human body. He'd just step back from the white board, sigh deeply, and turn to the classroom with glassy eyes and say, 'Isn't God just amazing? He really thought of everything!'"

McConnell's awe of God's creation wasn't the only thing he carried over from his youth. He also claims his ornery stubbornness as a child lasted into his professional years.

"My stubbornness gradually morphed into a combination of tenacity and resilience," McConnell said. "I think one of the reasons why I've achieved so much in my career is because I just won't give up. Even if it takes me forever, I'll just keep at something until I can make it happen. God has turned a weakness into something positive."

For the recently retired Falk, McConnell's 36 years at PLNU have brought much more than his accomplishments to the university.

"Mike is a joy to be with," shared Falk. "It is Mike's manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit that have been his most noteworthy qualities during these past 36 years. Those of us who have known him well as his colleagues or his students are very fortunate individuals. We are the beneficiaries. To the extent that we have passed on even half of what we have received from him, we, also, are successful persons. God has enriched the lives of a huge sphere of people through the one life of Dr. Michael McConnell, and each is truly grateful."

Michael and Kathryn recently celebrated their 43rd wedding anniversary. They have a son, Jonathan, who lives in Encinitas, Calif.

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