

IN MEMORY OF
**MONROE
J.
YODER**

Obituary for Monroe J. Yoder



Monroe J. Yoder, 85, of Grantsville, MD, died unexpectedly on Thursday, January 13, 2022, at Garrett Regional Medical Center, Oakland, MD, “drawing the curtain” on a remarkable life’s journey that began on June 11, 1936, when he was born at home in Boynton, PA, to the late John D. and Lydia (Tice) Yoder. The sixth of the family’s eight boys, brothers, Roy, Olen, Cloyd, Raymond, Marvin, Junior and Daniel and four girls, sisters, Iva, Verda, Lois and Dorothy. He is survived by one sibling, Marvin, Springs, PA; one daughter, Naomi Yoder, Grantsville, MD; one son, Keith (Lisa) Yoder, Morgantown, WV; one granddaughter, April Elizabeth (Wesley) Steyer; and one great-granddaughter, Rachel.

Raised in the Amish-Mennonite farming community of Somerset, PA/Garrett County, MD, he spoke only Pennsylvania Dutch until going to first grade. He enjoyed school, and by the age of 15 decided that he wanted to be the first person in his family to finish high school. However, shortly after securing his parents’ agreement, his father was incapacitated by a stroke, and Monroe had to leave school to help work the farm. Eventually earning his GED, graduating from Eastern Mennonite University and earning a PhD in biology from New York University, Monroe’s unconventional academic trajectory grew out of his often-stated commitment to “step out in faith and obedience.” Drafted during the Korean War, he did just that, registering as a conscientious objector, and opting for alternative service through Mennonite Central Committee.

The three places where he lived and worked during his two-year term of voluntary service had a profound impact on the way his life unfolded. At the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, where he served as a normal control patient, he got a glimpse into the world of science, and enjoyed the experience of living in close proximity to an urban area. At Wiltwyck School for Boys, Esopus, NY, he connected with New York City youngsters who were court-appointed to live there, and came away convinced that if he and his brothers had not been farm boys, they, too, might have been sent to such a facility. At Prairie View Hospital,

Newton, KS, an early inpatient mental health facility, he developed a deep appreciation for the intricacy of the human psyche, and participated in group therapy sessions that helped him understand and cope with the anger and depression he experienced after his father's stroke.

Monroe and Rachel (Miller), married in 1961, establishing a partnership in life and in ministry that shaped not only their immediate family, but ultimately also influenced the development of the entire New York City Mennonite "church family". They originally moved to Brooklyn in 1965, along with three-year-old daughter Naomi, because Monroe was enrolled in a two-year Master's degree program in biology. They soon began attending Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in Harlem, and as their church involvement deepened and their family grew (Keith was born in 1967), they decided to make New York their permanent home.

For years, Monroe somehow managed to navigate full-time employment at NYU, where he was the Director of Electron Microscopy Services at the time of his retirement, evening and weekend church commitments, and time with his family. Everyone he encountered was treated with respect and kindness, and he moved comfortably in a wide variety of academic, professional, church and community circles. He loved New York, and he relished the cultural and ethnic diversity of the New York City Mennonite churches. He and Rachel developed deep friendships and close working relationships with leaders and congregants throughout the five boroughs, as well as in the broader Mennonite Church. Initially ordained to pastoral ministry at Seventh Avenue, he later was ordained as the first resident bishop of the NYC District of Lancaster Mennonite Conference. In 2019, he joined with several other long-time New York City Mennonites to explore possibilities for worshipping together. These conversations led to the formation of Grace & Peace Mennonite Church, a primarily virtual congregation, where he became a founding member and was active until his death.

Understanding the importance of supporting children and families, he also was actively involved in the founding of Camp Deerpark, Westbrookville, NY, a children's camping ministry/retreat facility owned and operated by the NYC Mennonite churches. He also played a key role in the establishment of Seventh Avenue's Head Start program in 1969. In the intervening decades, he remained closely connected to both programs, serving in various capacities and always available for advice and counsel. He also spent countless hours over many years to bring to fruition a Harlem building project, also initiated by Seventh Avenue

Mennonite Church, that includes affordable rental housing.

Known variously as “MONroe,/MonROE”, “Mr. Monroe”, “Mr. Yoder,” “Dr. Yoder,” “Rev. Yoder”, “Pastor”, and “Bishop”—and , of course, “Daddy”, “Grandpa” and “Grandpa Monroe”—students, colleagues, neighbors, family members, friends, church leaders, members and community residents knew him as a mentor, brother, friend, and trusted confidante. Always genuinely interested in people and ideas, he treasured opportunities for conversation. Not one to judge or offer prescriptive advice, he was far more likely to ask questions, make observations, and patiently identify points of agreement from which to find common ground.

After Rachel died suddenly in 2008, Monroe tackled adjusting to his “new normal” with typical determination and grace. Their home had long been a place of hospitality and warm welcome, and that continued—including the annual Christmas party featuring his homemade turkey chili. The dining room table remained a center of activity, where meetings were held, games were played, mail was sorted, sermons were prepared, Easter eggs were dyed, and family—biological and beyond—gathered for meals and conversation. He thoroughly enjoyed hosting extended family members visiting NYC, and was especially delighted by visits from his nieces and nephews. Granddaughter April became his “travel buddy,” and they attended Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay, visited dear friends in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and eventually achieved their shared dream of a trip to Cuba.

Wherever he was, Monroe appreciated nature’s rhythms, often remarking on the phase of the moon, the direction of the breeze, or the color of the sky. As a boy, he worked in the garden with his mother, and came to appreciate it as a place for quiet conversation. As a young man, he showed the “Wiltwyck boys” how to plant, weed and harvest, and relationships were built as they nurtured the garden together. As a homeowner in the Bronx, he cared for the rosebushes outside his front door, often stopping to chat as friends and neighbors passed by. And in 2020, after making the difficult decision to move with Naomi into an independent living cottage in the Goodwill Retirement Village, Grantsville, MD, his ability to adapt was again apparent. In the spring he assembled planter boxes for miniature roses, planted three full-size rose bushes outside the front door, watered them regularly, and daily enjoyed the view from his rocking chair on the front porch.

As his 85th birthday approached last June, he frequently spoke about that milestone, saying that he was adjusting to slowing down physically, and

expressing delight in his great-granddaughter. “I take joy and comfort in knowing that life goes on,” he said during sharing time one Sunday. “Life is good in whatever stage we are in. May we find the grace that is sufficient for every day.” Amen.

Friends will be received at the Newman Funeral Homes, P.A., 179 Miller St., Grantsville, on Wednesday, January 19, 2022, from 2-4 and 6-8 p.m. Private family services will be held at the Maple Glen Mennonite Church on Thursday. Interment will be in the Maple Glen Cemetery.

Face masks are recommended.

Expressions of sympathy may be directed to Camp Deerpark, 200 Brandt Rd., Westbrookville, NY 12785.

Condolences may be sent to the family at www.newmanfuneralhomes.com.



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