

A graduate of Manchester College and later Bethany Seminary, Rev. Gerald Rhoades was called to the ministry at his home church in Greeneville, OH being ordained in 1973. His first call was in Rice Lake, WI, and lasted from 1973-1977. This was a very remote placement and included some leadership in smaller neighboring fellowships simultaneously.

In 1977, Gerald made the surprising move to the big city accepting a call at Douglas Park COB in Chicago, IL. This was a far cry from his small town upbringing in Ohio and remote location of his first call in Wisconsin. His time at Douglas Park was largely spent sermonizing, visiting members and leading Bible Studies. In addition he started a Crime Watch for the neighborhood. It was here that Gerald's love for the city began. He spent time in Guatemala learning Spanish. Perhaps most importantly, it was here that Gerald met the love of his life, Rita Wonders, who would later become his wife on December 10, 1979.

Pastor Gerald Rhoades was called to Harrisburg First in 1983 as the Director of Community Ministry. He understood the position to be a "chaplain for the neighborhood." Upon his arrival, he immediately got to work. A cornerstone of his early ministry was the formation of "Block Clubs." These groups were designed to engage neighbors in discussions about the important things happening around Allison Hill. In addition to, Pastor Gerald worked with members of Harrisburg First to support youth in the community. For years, BVS workers had organized and facilitated children's programming in the neighborhood. As BVS shifted away from the congregation, he worked with congregation members concerned about access to education, implementing a tutoring program. It was also around this same time that Gerald worked with several others to start Brethren Housing Association. What began as a volunteer-run operation has since become a thriving organization that provides a holistic program of stable housing, supportive services, and loving relationships for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The ministries on Hummel St. continued to expand. And out of this growth, Brethren Community Ministries, **bcmPEACE**, was born in 2000 under Pastor Gerald's leadership. **bcmPEACE** was incorporated as a faith-based non-profit, separate from and yet connected to Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren. Many today say that **bcmPEACE** is the community outreach arm of the church. Not only did this expand the ministry impact of Harrisburg First but it provided greater funding opportunities for neighborhood programs.

Today, **bcmPEACE** runs various programs in Allison Hill many of which began with Pastor Gerald. Wellness Hub not only distributes fresh produce brought in by the Central PA food bank, but also partners with community nurses, voter engagement volunteers, and other social services. Formerly known as Kid's Church, Shalom Kids teaches kids K-5 peacemaking principles and exposes them to the arts. Agape-Satyagraha is a Kingian Nonviolence conflict resolution program for youth and young adults. For over twenty years this has been an active ministry at Harrisburg First with 41 graduates and hundreds of participants. Not only did this program begin under the guidance of Pastor Gerald but he largely wrote and compiled the foundational elements for the curriculum.

Pastor Gerald continued as Executive Director of **bcmPEACE** until his retirement in 2013. To this day, he is an active member of Harrisburg First. He continues to mentor in the Agape-Satyagraha program and is a voice in the movement to end Gun Violence through the organization, Heeding God's Call. He remains faithful to the Church of the Brethren as he serves the ANE district as the Peace & Justice Coordinator. Along with his wife, Rita Rhoades, his children Marie Brenner-Rhoades, Dianna Rhoades, Lisa Ciccocioppi, Christine Nelsen, their spouses Eric Brenner-Rhoades, John Ciccocioppi, Scott Nelsen, and his four grandchildren, Morgainne Brenner-Rhoades, Job Benner Rhoades, Graham Nelsen, and Austin Ciccoppi, we enthusiastically celebrate Pastor Gerald's 50 years of ordained ministry in the Church of the Brethren.