



William Edward Morton

January 17, 1933 - September 10, 2025

William Morton - Bill, Dad, Grandpa Bill, Paw...lived a full, joyful, thoughtful life. When asked how he was doing, no matter the circumstances, his response and motto was always: "Life is Good." Bill's positive outlook stemmed from many things, but always orbited his faith.

Bill was a United Methodist pastor for 50+ years before his retirement in 2000, but he never really retired. Once he discovered his passion for theology at the Wesley Foundation at UW Madison he was led by his faith for the rest of his life.

His first assignment as a pastor in the United Methodist Church was in Franksville, WI with his wife Patty, and daughter Jenny who was born during their time there. They moved to Janesville, where their son Peter was born, then to Greenfield, where their third child Patrick was born. Greenfield was a special place, as Bill started the congregation from scratch. This allowed him to oversee the design and construction of a church building - which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Bill and family moved to Madison, did mission work in Hong Kong, and was assigned to Peshtigo, WI. His final assignment with the Wisconsin conference was in Wauwatosa, WI where he guided a merger between two congregations. After he retired, Bill took a church in Minneapolis that could not afford a full-time pastor. When he eventually "retired" again, he shared his love of sailing and philosophy on life by giving

free sailboat rides on Bde Maka Ska.

Bill loved the outdoors. As a child in Madison, he played with neighborhood friends in Starkweather Creek. While in college he spent his summers working at Glacier National Park using all his spare time exploring. He had many grand adventures during that time and after... some more questionable than others, like scaling ice cliffs with no gear and an encounter with a mountain lion, to name a couple. Bill took several canoe trips to the Boundary Waters and Quetico National Park- sometimes solo and sometimes with family or friends- despite never learning how to swim. He even trained for and attempted to climb Mt. Rainier at the age of 67.

Bill's joy and open mind for growing and learning never waned. This was evident in his avid participation in multiple study groups and continued education through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Minnesota (OLLI). He could often be found reading up on or discussing religion, philosophy, the outdoors, and world events, especially when the Golden Globe sailing competition came around. His bookcases were filled with cerebral reads, and he always had a freshly finished book to recommend.

Bill loved people. Wherever he went, he talked to everyone. Yes, truly everyone. He was earnest in his interest in people's stories and their lives and was quick to share about his life, his family and all things that mattered to him. His heartfelt beliefs and value of people motivated his dedication to social activism. Bill traveled by bus to the civil rights March on Washington in August 1963 where Martin Luther King gave his I Have a Dream speech. His life in the 1960's included several marches with Father Groppi, a noted civil rights activist, and fighting to pass the Open Housing Act in Greenfield, Wisconsin. This act ensures equal opportunity for housing regardless of gender, race, color, disability, religion, etc. He continued to fight for all, even at the age of 87, when he attended a peaceful demonstration following the murder of

George Floyd in 2020.

Bill is survived by his wife Patty, daughter Jenny (Eliseo), sons Peter (Krista), and Patrick (Kristina), and grandchildren Abegail, Aaron, Bailey, Camille, Cooper, and Adeline. He was preceded in death by his parents Earl and Emily Morton, and his grandson Jonah. He will be deeply missed by all.

A memorial service will be held at 2:00 PM, Sunday, September 14 at Lake Harriet United Methodist Church, 4901 Chowen Ave S, Minneapolis. Visitation with the family will start at 1:00 PM and a reception with light refreshments will follow the service. The service will be available for livestream at lakeharrietumc.org/stream/

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Morton Cure Paralysis Fund at mcpf.org (5021 Vernon Ave, Suite 145, Minneapolis, MN 55436).

May we all strive to carry on Bill's motto - Life is Good. Like Bill, live life to the fullest.

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 14. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

Lake Harriet United Methodist Church
4901 Chowen Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55410

Funeral Service

SEP 14. 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CT)

Lake Harriet United Methodist Church
4901 Chowen Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55410

Tribute Wall

BW

“ I was a young clergyman five years into my ministry with the Evangelical Covenant Church when I moved to a church about four blocks from Bill's Wauwatosa parish which hosted the weekly United Methodist lectionary study for pastors. Bill warmly welcomed this outsider into the group. Over time we developed something of a friendship, and at one point he invited me to join him in reading the volume of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics that he was in at the time, for which I am still grateful. It speaks to the stature of Bill's intellect and his grasp of theology that he was working his way through this daunting work, a work which I have returned to during retirement (I'm thinking of you, Bill). Fast forward a few years, I was in a very turbulent relationship with my congregation and needing to make a change of denomination and return to the United Methodist Church orientation of my childhood. Bill stepped forward to encourage me and to help facilitate the transition by introducing me to the local District Superintendent, for which, again, I will always be grateful. In short, Bill befriended me when I needed a friend, and it grieves me to hear of his death. However, the beautiful obituary posted here makes me appreciative and grateful for this dear brother's life which no doubt continues now in a higher register, transformed by the God he served faithfully and well for so long.

Brad Van Fossen, Milwaukee, WI - September 12, 2025 at 06:31 PM

BF

Brad Van Fossen

Brad Van Fossen - September 12, 2025 at 06:32 PM

MC

I loved Pastor Bill. After Joyce UMC closed, he led his little band of followers in worship every Sunday at Lake Harriet Church and occasionally at Lake Calhoun until Covid came. He named us "The Table". He was absolutely delightful.

Mary Cravens - September 13, 2025 at 10:52 PM

PG

When Bill came to Garrett Seminary he helped me relate my faith and my personal relationships. Since we both came from Madison it seemed quite natural! I am moved to remember all the good conversations with you, Patty, and send my prayers and hopes for you and your family. In Christ, Ken Gelhaus

Pastor Ken Gelhaus - September 21, 2025 at 05:35 PM