

## NADINE NEWCOMB

I first met Nadine in 1963 when she came to Ogdensburg, NJ where I was serving as pastor of a small Presbyterian Church. She told me about the First Presbyterian Church of Glassboro, describing it as a progressive church faithful to an evangelical past and open to a fresh understanding of its faith and mission. She pushed all the right buttons and when she asked if I would be interested in being interviewed by the Pastor Search Committee, I said I would happily do that. Neither one of us had any idea of what was to follow.

From this first meeting, I felt a spiritual kinship with Nadine that grew stronger year by year. I came to admire her, to respect her, to listen to her, to love her. In the tumultuous 60's we shared experiences in the church and in the world that tested us severely. I was fully aware that some of the conclusions I was reaching about the nature and mission of the church would be unpopular and would not be shared by others without some painful consequences.

She never accepted anything I said out of a sense of loyalty or just to go along. She argued forcefully against anything that did not make sense to her. However, once she was persuaded of any concept she fully invested herself, regardless of whether it was a popular position or not. On the other hand, when we found ourselves on different pages, she did not quit what she was doing, but continued her work with the same competence, devotion, and effectiveness that characterized everything she did.

For example, Nadine was chair of a building committee appointed to design and fund a new church sanctuary. When I arrived on the scene, the architectural plans were completed and the fund raising effort underway. Early on, I told her that idea of making major investments of energy and money in a new religious building did not inspire me as much as taking practical steps to make Christ's love visible in the world. Since plans were well underway, I said I would not oppose the effort, but I did not want to spend time actively promoting it. I knew of churches where ministers ended up doing little else for a long period.

Her response amazed me. She did not miss a beat. She continued enthusiastically to promote the building program, never once complaining that I was not helping. Her persistent efforts resulted in the completion of the beautiful new church building on time in 1964. During this same period, she continued to work as a member of the church Session on accomplishing many of the changes I advocated. She was amazing.

One of the positions the Session came to take seriously was that Christians are called to be salt in the world. They are to live out the values inspired by Christ in the world. For example, they were to be actively involved in addressing subjects like the causes of poverty, and in taking corrective action to bring real change in the communities where they lived.

Living out her faith, Nadine was determined to see the city of Glassboro establish a Housing Authority that would be responsible for the construction and management of decent housing for the poor. She succeeded. New housing units were built and occupied. Other members of the church became members of the board overseeing the housing program

In 1963, following the March on Washington and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech she helped organize the community's first Human Relations Council. This interracial organization sponsored a youth employment service, tutoring programs, a tennis clinic, a referral service for unemployed persons needing retraining, and a migrant center serving migrant farm laborers.

A three-county Community Action Program grew out of this effort. This agency organized and managed million dollar programs like Head Start to provide economic opportunity for the poor in South Jersey. It also started a Legal Service Program. Peter O'Connor, one of the first attorneys hired, later led legal efforts that resulted in a New Jersey Supreme Court requirement that every community in New Jersey must include its fair share of low-and-moderate housing in every new housing development.

She accomplished much in her lifetime that expressed the spirit of Christ. She was energetic, optimistic, determined, creative, and courageous. She was also tough and willing to speak the truth in love. My wife and I will deeply miss her.

Robert W. Shaffer  
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