

## Hydie Houston Obituary



Rev. Hydie Rial Houston

August 4, 1938- September 10, 2023

The Bible records the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, when he recounted being visited by a blinding light and spoken to by Jesus. Paul was so moved by the experience that he recast his life's mission.

Similarly, Hydie Houston had a dramatic experience late one night, some years after enduring a life-threatening bout of breast cancer and cobalt radiation therapy in 1972. She vividly described a visitation, not unlike Paul's, calling her to the church. Always courageous, adventuresome, and intellectually curious, Hydie accepted that call and earned her Master's of Divinity degree at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1981. She was ordained that same year as one of Pittsburgh's first woman ministers.

Hydie's calling coincided with a critical new era for traditional religious institutions. Changing demographics and evolving urban profiles challenged customary service models. Hydie's career was at the vanguard of how churches needed to adapt, bring new ideas and fresh energy in order to continue to be centers of faith and service.

Her first position took her to Smithfield United Church in downtown Pittsburgh

under the mentorship of Rev. Pete Weaver, whom she always said was the role model for her ministry. Smithfield had just opened Bethlehem Haven-the first shelter for homeless women in Pittsburgh. A young adults ministry and caring for the older members of the church were also important parts of her role.

Next, she was called to Minneapolis to help Highland Park Presbyterian Church deal with their serious problem of neglected and out-of-control youth, mainly Native American, who were vandalizing the church. Through a partnership with General Mills, the church became the center for good food daily, overnight beds, alcohol intervention, tutoring, and visits to their fathers on reservations. The success of the program led to a return of many of the church faithful and a new cadre of parishioners.

Despite the love of both the job and Minneapolis, Hydrie returned to Pittsburgh to be available for her aging parents and joined the team at East Liberty Presbyterian Church in 1990. Hydrie was called to leadership when the historic ELPC was modernizing its membership by reaching out to all races, cultures, and nationalities. Her 11 years there aided in an important transition for the church as it established itself as the "Cathedral of Hope," a great asset to the neighborhood. In 1999, the Allegheny County Commissioners honored her for "Invaluable Service" to the County.

Semi-retirement took her to the Conneaut Lake region of PA to live in a historic house, part of a large working farm, on property granted by William Penn. An avid outdoors enthusiast, Hydrie walked every day in all seasons. A variety of birds and wildlife were part of her enjoyment. She could distinguish the calls of many of the common birds we all know. Bluebirds even ate mealworms from her hand.

Butterflies were favorites to observe. Hydrie was a classic car enthusiast and owner who loved to ride in a parade or take a Sunday drive. She also enjoyed the

opportunity to serve as a "pulpit supply" interim minister, and Head of Session for various country churches.

Hydie moved to Longwood at Oakmont in 2019 where she was an active participant in the community. She contributed the prayer to the community weekly newsletter, gardened with passion, and took comfort in the fellowship of Pastor Steve at Oakmont Presbyterian Church and Pastor Will at Longwood.

The eldest child of Greensburg, PA natives William S. Rial Jr. and Sally Wentling Rial, Hydie grew up in the family home on Aylesboro Avenue in Pittsburgh. She graduated from The Ellis School and received her B.A. from Mt. Holyoke College. Notably, her Presbyterian Ordination in 1981 broke new ground for a Mt Holyoke graduate.

She has two sons: James 1960 (Winter Park, CO) and William, Jr 1965. (West Palm Beach, FL.) A daughter Hydie, died from SIDS in 1963. Her three siblings remember her fondly for the example she set: Sally (Palm Beach, FL), Anne (Hingham, MA) and Willam III (West Linn OR). Her second husband Ed Lillibridge (Hermitage, PA) was a devoted and loving caregiver. She is also survived by two grandchildren Thad (Truckee, CA) and Nat (Seattle, WA) and two great grandchildren Willa and Otis (Truckee, CA.) Hydie's verve and zest will be sorely missed by all.