



## Roger O. Colvin

Pastor, 1967-1972

**By: Dr. Nancy Taylor**

First asked to fill in for Second Union's sick minister—he was paid \$25 a Sunday, an amount that bought his family of five a good dinner at a steak house—Roger Colvin accepted Second Union's offer to be its full-time minister in 1967. He said one reason he accepted was that he and Phyllis, his wife, hoped they could encourage Second Union members to consider how they might improve the work and living situations of the

Roger and Phyllis had gotten to know church members during this interim period, but his real job at the time was Methodist student work at the University of Puerto Rico. He began that work for the Methodists and spent eight years creating a vital program. He'd begun to think a local pastor should take over the job at about the same time as Second Union needed a new minister. He, Phyllis, and their three children—Richard, Carol, and Philip—already were familiar with the island, and he knew the language. It would be a good fit for both the Colvins and Second Union.

Roger's roots were in New York State and, later, in Pennsylvania. As a child, he and his family moved often (about 10 times in 18 years) as his father searched for work during the depression years. After serving in the Navy's radio program in the last years of World War II, Roger met Phyllis at a Methodist youth group meeting, and the two decided they'd like to do mission work. Both graduated from Asbury College and had a chance to do a year's mission work in Haiti. After that, Roger decided he wanted to become a minister. They came home so he could attend seminary at Temple University. After graduation, he began work with the UPR students.

Coming to Second Union was, said Roger, "a real affirmation for me." The congregation appreciated both him and Phyllis. Always a team, the two found their feet quickly. Phyllis sang in the choir, taught Sunday School,

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and was crucial in the work of the Women's Guild, which sponsored bazaars, fashion shows, international dinners, and trips to scope out what other churches (Catholic and Protestant) were doing to benefit the needs in their communities. The Guild also provided refreshments during the after service social get-together. Phyllis even prepared the monthly newsletter—gathered the news, laid it out, cut the stencils, and mimeographed *The Lamplighter*.

We had interesting church services—including several outstanding youth services—while they were there (Roger was willing to try just about anything—including turning all the chairs away from the pulpit at the beginning of one service). We also had great fun. At Christmas time we had a tree with gag gifts; in a five-year span, Roger “drew” the gag gift of a shower head three times. Each time it was wrapped to hide its shape, and each time we got a good laugh out of his drawing the hated gift.

Roger had a great sense of humor, a quiet, dry wit. In his memoir, he has a photo of himself at about age five or six. Beneath it are these words: “Would you spank this child?” He could also be direct and often challenged some of my queries and statements. Once when I asked his help in dealing with my father, whose beliefs about race were different from mine, Roger asked, “What gives you the right to think you can change the beliefs of this man, beliefs he's held all his life?”

Everywhere he went—even to Haiti and Puerto Rico--Roger took with him his ham radio equipment, maintaining ties with family from afar, passing along information about survivors of hurricanes or earthquakes. Everywhere they lived, he looked for tall trees around the house so he could attach his antennae. He kept his call letters W3PWH from the time he got them, in 1947, until his death in 2008.

At Second Union, Roger was known as a really good preacher, a really good prayer, and a not-so-good visitor of his flock. When Roger paid you a pastoral visit, he was so shy you were the one who had to carry the conversation. But when he stepped into the pulpit, that shyness disappeared. His sharp mind showed itself, as did often, his innate distrust of wealth and the wealthy. Roger's sermons punched us into thinking about our daily lives and the lives of others. One sermon, entitled “Malnutrition in a Day of Plenty,” challenged us about squandering the plenty we had and reminded us how little plenty so many others have. My favorite was “The Nitty-Gritty of the Kingdom of God.” In it, Roger talked about the ways in which God's work requires us to do the daily, messy jobs, in much the same way Jesus did in his time: get our hands dirty. He used the mimeograph machine as one example. When I saw that title and heard that sermon, I thought, “This man—and this church—really understand what it's like to be Christians in today's world. I want to be a member of this church.”

And yes, Roger's prayers were amazing. During those years, an Easter sunrise service was held on the ramparts of El Morro, and many local churches participated in the service. One year Roger was asked to give the opening prayer; here's the first paragraph: Are you awake, God, at this ungodly hour? Did we beat you up

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this morning? Have we come—whether by custom, chance, or choice—to speak to empty skies and knock on doors yet locked? God, are you awake? Are you awake to hear an Alleluia or two, to hear us as we shout the words about a risen Lord? Are you awake? We do not want this effort to be made in vain. To read this prayer in its entirety, refer to the Second Union Church Jubilee History Index, “Two Prayers by Roger Colvin” by Dr. Nancy Taylor.

In 1972, Roger and his family left Second Union so he could return to work with Methodist churches in Pennsylvania. He served at Easton and Mt. Joy, at the latter for fifteen years before he retired. Of their time at Second Union, Phyllis said this, with her typical understatement: “I did nothing spectacular, but remember it with gratitude.” And in his memoir Roger stated, “There would never be another congregation like Second



Richard, Carol, Phyllis and Philip, Roger

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