



George & Joan McMurray
ATTENDED

Union Church
Second Union Church 1965-present

By Pastor Bob Zoba

My initial encounter with George McMurray came just after delivering my maiden sermon at Second Union Church. Since I was still merely a pastoral candidate, the sermon was sort of like a homiletically audition. It was immediately followed by a Q & A that was open to anyone in attendance that day. After a few perfunctory questions, George stood up and asked me a very, very personal question that caught me a bit by surprise and caused gasps of silence across the congregation. As difficult as it was to answer that question, it was one of those “elephant in the room” subjects that is better addressed sooner rather than later. George simply made sure it was sooner.

This was my introduction to George McMurray. Joan once said of him, “Some people think George is opinionated. But he’s not opinionated; he is just a person with a lot of opinions”. Translation: George is a thoughtful person who has strong opinions on an assortment of subjects. However, as ready-and-willing as George is to offer his opinions, he is equally ready-and-willing to hear and consider other people’s opinions as well. And this attitude is critical in a Union Church setting like ours. That is, we are not a non-denominational church. We are an inter-denominational church. This means that we are not going to pretend that differences of opinion do not exist; instead, it means we are willing to pronounce, discuss, and consider opinions, our own and each other’s, so that “iron sharpens iron”. Thus, through our exchange, we each grow in our understanding of the Lord and of each other. George is the epitome of that direct, but loving and tolerant spirit that should pervade a Union Church.

As the only surviving charter member of Second Union, George and Joan brought that unique approach to 2UC from the very beginning. In fact, even before our church was birthed back in the 60s, George

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& Joan were active members at our founding church, The Union Church of San Juan. As that congregation boomed to two services on Sundays, the leadership discussed the establishment of a Second Union Church here in Guaynabo. Since George & Joan lived in this very neighborhood, it would have been logical for them to support this idea. However, George was actively involved in the Sunday School ministry of Union Church and believed that a new church would hamper that important ministry by splitting it asunder.

Therefore, George vigorously opposed the notion of a new church plant. However, once the proposal was approved, George (& Joan) accepted the majority vote and then got on board to make it happen.

If you read the annals of our history, you soon realize how difficult it was to establish a new church start among a very transient English-speaking community. But, thanks to the dedication of dear souls like George and Joan, this ministry survived and eventually thrived. Of course, as we just celebrated our 50th Anniversary, and were blessed by the visit of Karen and Kim Ort, we were reminded of the sacrificial generosity of Lew & Pearl Ort as they pledged over a half a million dollars (in today's dollars) to build the present sanctuary. But as impressive as that donations was, the response of this fledgling congregation was even more impressive as they had to match that contribution in order to benefit from it. George and Joan were among those who responded heroically to the challenge. In fact, George was the chair of the building committee that made it all happen.

However, as grateful as I am for George & Joan in the various roles that they have played as members of Second Union, past and present, I am even more grateful for their friendship. George & Joan serve as surrogate parents to Christie and me, and yet, at the same time, as contemporaries and friends. Through the years, we have spent many wonderful hours together, going to the cinema and discussing the themes of the movie over dinner. Since Joan is a student of Shakespeare and a tenured professor in English Literature, her insights and ideas are always valuable and well-informed. George and Joan have led such interesting lives and the mix of Southern gentility and crazy adventurism is refreshing. Indeed,



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although the McMurrays are of an “older” generation, they are very young at heart and flexible of mind. Thus, they are my inspiration as my grey hairs prosper and my years add up. I hope, as I enter my golden years, that I will be just like George and Joan: intellectually engaged, spiritually curious, open-minded and yet strongly convinced of my own beliefs, active in my local church, and finally, very much in love with my spouse and life’s partner. Would that we could all be more like George and Joan!!!

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