

Dear Newville Congregation,

March 9, 2025

Over the past few days, many of us have participated in the celebration of a very significant person in the Hoam family—the family’s matriarch, Judy Hoam. I would like to invite you all today to join me in a celebration of another important person in that family—the family’s patriarch, Gary Hoam, Judy’s beloved husband.

When we talk about the imprint of Judy’s hands and heart on Newville Church, we don’t always say that there was ever and always someone by her side. Gary drew up the architecture plans for the church expansions; and he hammered and painted and polished with a passion equal to his wife’s. The two of them, and those who helped at their direction, gave us this beautiful church as a gift. But the greatest gift Gary gave to all Newvillians was allowing us to witness a vivid demonstration of an exemplary and heart-gripping love for his wife.

I was an interim professor in a class in the chaplaincy program at Ashland Seminary for a few years, and one of the texts I required for my students was a remarkable little book called *A Promise Kept* by Robertson McQuilken. It doesn’t look much like a textbook, but I didn’t miss that the professor who succeeded me kept it as one of his required texts too. My thought? He must have read it!

Dr. Robertson McQuilkin (who died June 2, 2016, at the age of 88) was formerly the president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary, now Columbia International University, in Columbia, South Carolina. He was a conference speaker and author, but I think his greatest contribution was his sacrificial commitment to his wife Muriel as he cared for her throughout her 20-year struggle with early onset Alzheimer’s. He resigned from his Columbia presidency to become his wife’s full-time caregiver during the difficult last years of her life. When Robertson announced his resignation, he said simply this: “I promised ‘in sickness and in health, ’til death do us part,’ and I’m a man of my word.”

Robertson’s story is beautifully shared in *A Promise Kept*, which is perhaps the most well-known of his 19 books. There came a time in his care for Muriel when she was only content when her husband was by her side. This meant that she would need to accompany him whenever he traveled for his many speaking engagements. Here is one memorable quote from his book:

Once our flight was delayed in Atlanta, and we had to wait a couple of hours. Now that’s a challenge. Every few minutes, the same questions, the same answers about what we’re doing here, when are we going home? And every few minutes we’d take a fast paced walk down the terminal in earnest search of—what? Muriel had always been a speed walker. I had to jog to keep up with her!

An attractive woman sat across from us, working diligently on her computer. Once, when we returned from an excursion, she said something without looking up from her papers. Since no one spoke to me or at least mumbled in protest of our constant activity, “Pardon?” I asked.

“Oh,” she said, “I was just asking myself, ‘Will I ever find a man to love me like that?’”

Well, Judy did find a man to love her like that. And Gary, like Robertson, was a man of his word. In Judy’s memory, and as a dedication to the man who kept his promise to her, Newville would like to give the book *A Promise Kept* as a gift to each family here today. We think it is fitting that the book bearing Gary and Judy’s name and an unforgettable message may be carried into all of your homes.

From Teresa Davis, for Grateful Newvillians