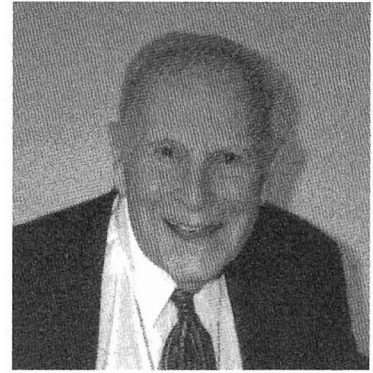


Commendable Catawbans



The Reverend Stanley Louis Stiver, Jr.

This is the third in a series of Past Times articles featuring men and women whose lives and careers have enriched the history of Catawba County. For this issue, the CCHA welcomes Sylvia Ray's commemoration of the Reverend Stanley Louis Stiver, Jr.

In the mid-eighteenth century, with the pioneer settlers of the Catawba Valley, came the "parsons," hardy pastors who trekked into the wilderness and circuit-riding preachers who visited backwoods communities to share the Gospel, marry couples, and offer their blessings.

From its earliest days, Catawba has had religion at the core of its way of life. Churches were the center of most neighborhoods as both the place of worship and the site of education. The pastor-preacher was among the prominent citizens.

Two hundred years later in the mid-twentieth century a hardy parson made his way into Catawba and, like his pioneer predecessors, became one of the county's influential citizens—a pioneer in the modern world's approach to religion as he bridged the gaps between church and civic life.

The Reverend Stanley Louis Stiver, Jr., has earned a page in the history of his adopted home, going beyond the traditional denominational parish and broadening the role of pastor to encompass the entire population of Catawba. Now retired, the Lutheran clergyman enjoys a place of honor.

He came to Claremont in 1959 as pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran Church and remained in that post for thirty-one years, until 1990. He was one of the first area pastors to become a community activist.

Stiver led the eastern Catawba town into the Piedmont Area Development Association (PADA), a Charlotte-based coalition that encouraged small communities in North and South Carolina to join in the progressive thrust that followed World War II. Under his leadership, Claremont forged ahead and for years won top awards in annual sixteen-county regional competitions sponsored by PADA, scoring first-place honors in 1962, '63, '67, '68, and '71.

A consensus builder, Stiver earned a precedent-setting position as the first clergyman ever to head the coun-

ty-wide Chamber of Commerce. He had been president of the Eastern Catawba Chamber from 1967 to 1974 and when the organization went county-wide he was elected its president in 1977. He was on the original committee that founded the YMCA at Conover and was on its board from 1968 to 1977. He was a charter member of the county's Industrial Development Commission and served its board from 1977 to 1984, a period that saw the coming of Valley Hills Mall, Hickory Furniture Mart, and the Meredith-Burda printing plant.

As part of his humanitarian endeavors he became a legend in local Red Cross work: for more than twenty years the church minister led the blood collection program and chaired eighty bloodmobile visits that brought in 13,000 pints of blood. Under his direction the goal for local blood donations grew from 8,000 pints to over 200,000 pints. He insisted on afternoon-to-evening bloodmobile visits, something never done before and which has become the most successful period for the Red Cross collections.

"Today people take for granted the extended telephone service," which unites the entire county in free phone calling, Stiver noted, as he recalled his battle to get toll-free calling from Hickory to eastern Catawba.

He co-chaired the county's 1992 sesquicentennial year-long events. And he began broadcasting on a local radio station the Sunday morning worship services at St. Mark's, a tradition that has continued for fifteen years. "I think every church should be involved in its community," he declared.

"Stanley Stiver came here at a time when there was a transition in our society," commented Sidney Halma, executive director of the Catawba County Historical Association. "It was the era of the post-war boom, the baby boom. People were looking to the future, and he helped a small community develop a sense of itself. He made people feel good about their community, which until

then had been a sleepy little town. He was saying, 'Look here, people, take note of what you have here.'"

The clergyman is most widely known for his collection of examples of the Christian cross. Early in his ministry he began acquiring commemorative crosses as reminders of conferences he attended around the U.S., but it was 1967 when St. Mark's congregation gave him and his wife, Jane, a three-week trip to the Holy Land and Europe that the collecting "bug" bit Stiver in a big way. Since then he has created a collection of about one thousand crosses from about fifty countries.

About one hundred pieces of the Stiver collection (which also include nativity scenes) are on display in cabinets in the new Claremont City Hall, rotating on a regular basis. The Christian symbols were a featured exhibit for fifteen years at the Southern Christmas Show in Charlotte and have been seen—along with the collector—on television stations in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, and Durham.

The Stivers' younger son, David Stiver of San Francisco, is in the process of preparing a manuscript and taking photos of his father's crosses to publish a book about the collection. The couple's older son, John Stiver, is a local school principal.

Reverend Stiver's family came to Catawba County after church posts in New Orleans and Wheeling, West Virginia. Since his "retirement" from St. Mark's, the couple have moved to Hickory and he has continued ministering through interim pastorates at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Hickory and Ebenezer Lutheran Church near Catawba. Since 2000 he has been visitation pastor for St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Hickory.

The resume of Stanley Stiver looks like one for a corporate tycoon. The list of groups for which he has served as president is lengthy, including Wheeling Kiwanis Club, Piedmont and Claremont PADA, Eastern Catawba and Catawba County Chambers, the Catawba Valley Chapter of the Red Cross, Catawba County Library Board of Trustees, Eastern Catawba Cooperative Christian

Ministry, the county's civic center referendum committee, Catawba County Elder Plan, the Eastern Catawba United Way. He also served on the charter board of the consolidated county-wide United Way.

His board memberships, both in the secular part of the community and in theological circles, go on and on, including nationwide service like the evangelism work he did for his denomination in California, Pennsylvania, New York, and Florida in the 1950's and 60's. He served on the Lenoir-Rhyne College Board of Visitors from 1984 to 1990.

Equally impressive is the account of Stiver's honors and awards, including his being the first recipient in 1990 of the county Chamber's Outstanding Citizen Award and Newton-Conover Rotary Club's first non-Rotarian to win its Vocational Service Award. He has been Newton-Conover Civitan Club's Man of the Year in 1964; "Citizen Par Excellence" in 1968 from Citizens Savings and Loan;



The Reverend Stanley Stiver shares several crosses from his extensive collection.

Claremont Jaycees' 1980 Man of the Year; a lifetime member of Claremont Fire Department; and 1998 Catawba County Volunteer Summit Volunteer of the Year. He won Lenoir-Rhyne College's 1999 Community Service Award; Governor Hunt's 1999 Governor's Community Service Award; the local Red

Cross chapter's Lifetime

Membership; and in 2002 the Red Cross's Lifetime Achievement Award.

He organized Claremont's first community parade in 1966 and wrote the town's history in 1968. For almost twelve years he served as facilitator of Pathways, a Catawba County bereavement support organization. The clergyman led seven international trips to Europe, Egypt, and the Holy Land from 1968 to 1983 and eighteen trips to seven U.S. cities for almost 1,000 persons from 1979 to 1983.