

Octogenarian minister marks 60th anniversary of ordination

- [By Robin Caudell Press-Republican](#)
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The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Parker cuts the cake marking the 60th anniversary of ordination at Princeton University as a Presbyterian minister.



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- The Essex Community Church marquee congratulates the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Parker on the 60th anniversary of ordination as a Presbyterian minister.

PERU — At 85, the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Parker still serves three local churches — Essex Community, Moriah Methodist Church, and the Mount Moriah Presbyterian Church in Port Henry.

The 60th anniversary of his ordination was celebrated with a luncheon in Essex.

His spiritual path started in northern New Jersey, where he was born. He attended Middlebury College in Vermont where he met his wife, Helle. After three years of graduate work at Princeton University, he was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1965.

His first charge was in Salem, New York, before he started a 33-year tenure at the Peru Community Church.

“But while I was at Peru, I also served Richmond Grove Presbyterian Church in New Zealand for a year. That was in 1980. In 1990, I won an international preaching contest and was preaching guest minister in Australia for six months. Then, we came back and finished up at Peru. After Peru, I served the Morrisonville Methodist Church. Then from there, went to Moriah Methodist. I’m still there. That was 2012. During that time, added the Port Henry Presbyterian Church. Then a few years later, added the Essex Community Church,” he said.

Taking in the long view, Parker was on a singular mission.

“I always wanted to serve people and try to make things better. After I finished Princeton, I got a master’s degree in counseling at Plattsburgh State, and then working on my doctorate in pastoral counseling at Vanderbilt. At Peru Church, we had a big emphasis on doing things for other people. You know, our Jamaican mission. For many years we sent people to Jamaica, and New York City and Washington, DC (soup kitchens). Always trying to reach out and improve society as a whole if we can and individuals the best we can,” he said.

When Parker retired in 2003, he started Therapet, an animal assisted therapy farm, a not-for-profit 5013c.

“It still exists. It’s just not at my farm anymore. I still have a therapy farm, but I only focus on grieving children. Taking donkeys to nursing homes got to be a little difficult for me at my age.”

Two mantras Parker lives by:

“Learn something new every day.”

“If you see a need, try to fix it.”

On Sundays, Parker leads a 9 o’clock service in Port Henry, and 11 o’clock services in Essex. He has done that about 13 years and counting.

The clergy sphere is far different than when he was ordained.

“It’s a lack of clergy and the decline of churches as a whole. When I left Peru, we had two full-time ministers and two full-time secretaries, and now it’s a part-time church with Plattsburgh Methodist Church. But, that’s typical. Everywhere. Churches that had 200 to 300 people on Sundays are now down to 20. That’s the biggest change. That’s been huge,” he said.

Parker doesn’t think people are less spiritual than in the past.

“They are finding their spiritual needs in other places. I’m not sure where. It’s a cultural phenomenon, and it’s not just here,” he said.

Churches he served or founded in New Zealand and Australia reveal the same deep decline.

“What were vibrant churches in the 1980s are now struggling churches. It looks like it may be the end of era, unless there is some kind of great awakening. I’m not sure,” he said.

Societal mores have changed drastically.

“It used to be that culturally Sunday mornings were sacred. Now, it’s filled with children’s sports and activities. Parents are asked to make a choice. Do I go to church or do I watch my child play Little League baseball or soccer or whatever? Back when I first started, no one would ever think of doing that on a Sunday morning. That was just not done.”

Parker was once told that his 1965 ordination coincided with the pinnacle of mainline Protestant churches – Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Episcopalian.

“It’s been downhill ever since. I don’t know that I contributed, but that certainly has been the case,” he said.

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