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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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105 Seminary Road
San Anselmo, CA 94960
415.451.2800
www.sfts.edu

SFTS Contact
Holly Woolard
Communications Manager
415-451-2823
hwoolard@sfts.edu

Rev. Dr. Howard Rice remembered as spiritual leader

SAN ANSELMO, Calif., Aug. 8 – Rev. Dr. Howard Leland Rice, San Francisco Theological Seminary chaplain and professor of ministry from 1968-97, died on Sunday, Aug. 8, in Claremont, Calif., at the age of 78. For more than 50 years, Rice served the larger Presbyterian Church as one of its most respected spiritual leaders.

Rice was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis prior to his appointment at SFTS and spent his time on the San Anselmo campus either on crutches or confined to a wheelchair. After Rice's retirement, his diagnosis was changed from MS to spinal cord damage. Last spring he battled a stubborn bone infection for weeks, resulting in his decision to accept hospice care. He passed away peacefully surrounded by his family.

A memorial service honoring Rice's life will take place Aug. 20 at 2:30 p.m. at Claremont Presbyterian Church. SFTS is planning a ceremony to be held in San Anselmo when seminary is in session. The date and time have not been finalized.

In the early 1970s, when a student gave him a copy of Morton T. Kelsey's *The Other Side of Silence*, Rice realized he needed to feed not only his mind, but also his soul. By the mid-1970s, Rice recruited other pastors and scholars in the Bay Area to organize spiritual retreats for local pastors.

For the next 20 years he helped Presbyterians and other Protestants discover spirituality within the Protestant-Reformed tradition. An expert in Presbyterian polity, Rice was elected moderator of the 191st General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. in 1979. During his year as moderator, he organized three spirituality retreats for delegates from presbyteries throughout the country.

Rice was instrumental in establishing "Companions on the Inner Way," a retreat/conference that has served hundreds of pastors and lay persons. He also played a significant role in developing SFTS's pioneering program in spirituality. This led to the creation of the Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction and the Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Formation programs, which in turn has prepared a cadre of spiritual directors within the Reformed tradition.

“Howard had a huge heart for people, for ministry, and for the Church that he served so long and well,” said Dr. Elizabeth Liebert, SFTS dean and professor of spiritual life. “Always standing with the underdog, he was persistent to the point of stubbornness in defending them. He is beloved by hundreds of students, pastors and church folk, whose hopes and struggles he held dear. We mourn the loss of mentor, colleague, spiritual adviser, friend and consummate pastor.”

Rice’s landmark book, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction to Believers* (1991), continues to be widely read in seminaries. In 1998, he published *The Pastor as Spiritual Guide*. He also co-authored *Reformed Worship* with James C. Huffstutler in 2001 and co-edited *A Book of Reformed Prayers* with Lamar Williamson, Jr. in 1998. To honor his retirement from SFTS in 1997, Rep. Lynn C. Woolsey presented a tribute to Rice before the U.S. House of Representatives. In 2007, SFTS trustee and alumna, Rev. Jackie Leonard, made a first gift to the seminary toward the Rice Family Chair in Christian Spirituality. The endowed chair honors Rice, his wife Nancy, the late Rev. Wendy Rice Dreitcer, her husband, Dr. Andrew Deeter Dreitcer, and their longstanding contributions to the spiritual nurture of students, church leaders and congregations.

Rice earned a BA in history from Carroll College (Waukesha, Wis.) in 1953 and graduated from McCormick Theological Seminary with a BD in 1956. He was ordained by the Presbytery of Winnebago in 1956, serving as pastor of House of Faith Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis through 1961. He was pastor of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Chicago from 1961-68.

Rice received a number of honors in his long and distinguished ministerial and teaching career, including honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees from Whitworth College (1978) and Carroll College (1980). He was the McCormick Theological Seminary Distinguished Alumnus in 1986. The SFTS board of trustees conferred on him the title of Professor of Ministry Emeritus upon his retirement.

Among Rice’s survivors are his wife, Nancy, and his daughter, Amanda. His daughter, Rev. Wendy Rice Dreitcer (M.Div. ’83), died in 2004 of a brain tumor.

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San Francisco Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) graduate school, has prepared leaders for the church since 1871. One of the founding members of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, it offers theological degrees, including Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry, at its campuses in San Anselmo and Pasadena. For more information please call SFTS at 1-800-447-8820 in San Anselmo or 1-800-473-8772 in Pasadena. Also find information online at www.sfts.edu.