

Former Chaplain Lived His Life Bravely, Openly

(This editorial is a reprint from the January 17 edition of the Winston-Salem Journal)

by David Dalton

What's a community to think? Frequently, in the pages of this newspaper, one reads arguments that homosexuality is inherently immoral and destructive to the family. But then, yesterday, you may have read in this same newspaper of the death of Clark Thompson, an ordained Moravian minister, a teacher of religion and philosophy, a community leader. Thompson was a gay man. He died of AIDS at the age of 54.

Clark Thompson did not live two separate lives, as some gay people must do, to avoid the pain and problems that such openness can cause. Clark Thompson lived one life, bravely and openly, partly in the hope that when communities try to answer the question of whether some people or some things are inherently bad, they will have something more than false myths to work with.

How could anyone say that Clark Thompson was destructive to family values, when he performed the marriage rites for many traditional couples and counseled them to hold them together through their inevitable times of stress? He poured vast amounts of his energy into this community - not just the gay community, but the entire community.

What unusual thing did he ask of the community in return? To bring

the person he loved to church with him on Sundays, to sit beside him there, to sing from the same hymnal.

Beyond that, the rest was private, really, as it should be for anyone.

Still, a community might wonder, what was life like on the other side of his front door?

There was a cozy living room, a fireplace, an often-used dining room lined with books, a busy kitchen. There was an ear that was always willing to listen to someone who had a problem to tell, or a fear to face, or a tough question to ask. There was wisdom and nurture and comfort.

Family.

A different sort of family, maybe. But what better word can be found for a group of people bound by love who face life, and death, together?

This is not the place for moral questions or theological questions or political questions for which Clark Thompson would gladly have offered some possible answers.

Much more important today, the day of his funeral, is the example of his life, an example that offers much to this community, both to those who are gay and to those who are not:

Live life bravely. Find love. Look for better answers. Face death. Help others live life. Help others find love. Help others look for better answers. Help others face death.

To point one's finger and condemn is quite an easy thing. To live a life like Clark Thompson's is very, very difficult.

Thompson - cont. from p. 1

The traditions of Salem and the Moravians occupied a special place in Clark Thompson's heart. He and Dr. Litzenberg began the tradition of a Senior class procession to Sister Mary Oesterline's grave site in God's Acre in the spring. According to Dr. Litzenberg, Dr. Thompson so loved the tradition that he walked with the aid of a cane two years ago and was driven by car to the grave site this past spring.

Dr. Thompson's dedication and seriousness shown through in his observance of Moravian customs and his involvement in local and global social programs, such as OxFam out of Boston, Mass. But Through his good nature he had a joke with Dr.

Litzenberg. "He was the only professor who would dress in eighteenth century Moravian clothes without embarrassment."

Dr. Clark Thompson brought people together. Performing Moravian love feasts, Christmas Candlelight services, or Salem convocations his presence demanded attention and his words demanded retention. In David Dalton's editorial from the Winston-Salem Journal describes Dr. Thompson and his home this way: "There was an ear that was always willing to listen to someone who had a problem to tell, or a fear to face, or a tough question to ask. There was a wisdom and nurture and comfort."

Dr. Litzenberg has requested that this resolution be reprinted in *The Salemite*.

Resolution of the Board of Trustees of Salem Academy and College

WHEREAS Dr. Clark A. Thompson has served Salem College faithfully and well for twenty-five years as professor of religion;

WHEREAS he previously has served as well for three years on the faculty of Salem Academy;

WHEREAS he has provided spiritual guidance to this community as Chaplain of the College;

WHEREAS he has twice served with great distinction as the Dean of the College;

WHEREAS he is recognized as an accomplished scholar, a distinguished teacher, and an admired administrator;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of Salem Academy and College hereby declares that Dr. Clark A. Thompson is designated hereafter as Clarkson Shields Starbuck Professor of Religion and Chaplain of the College Emeritus;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of Salem Academy and College hereby conveys its continuing affection, admiration, and support for Dr. Clark A. Thompson.

Mary Bryant Newell
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Salem Academy and College

November 21, 1989

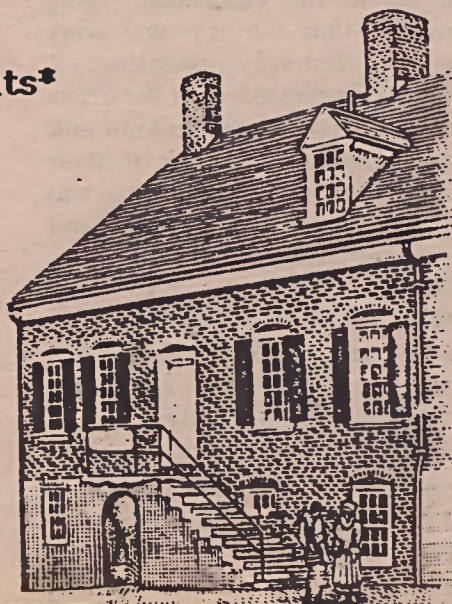
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