



Chester Lehman Wenger

October 1, 2020

Chester Lehman Wenger, 102, (born 4/10/1918) died early Thursday morning, October 1, 2020. He died peacefully with family caring for him in his residence at Landis Homes, Lititz, PA, where he moved in January 2020. In his last days, he played his harmonica – “God be with you till we meet again” – offered his strong bass to many familiar songs, and continued to envision how to transform whole communities. His beloved wife of 73 ½ years, Sara Jane (Weaver) Wenger, preceded him in death on March 23, 2018, as did his eldest son, Chester Lloyd Wenger who died November 16, 2001.

Chester, the youngest of seven children, was born in Fentress, Norfolk Co., VA, to the late Amos Daniel and Anna May (Lehman) Wenger. Growing up, his family migrated between summers on the family farm in Fentress, VA, and the school year at Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, VA, where his father was president. Chester liked to study and excelled at school. He graduated from EMS in 1936 with an associate’s degree and went on to complete his bachelor’s degree in biology at nearby Bridgewater College.

A few years later, back at EMS for additional Bible study, Chester met Sara Jane, who he described as “so beautiful and loveable I couldn’t resist.” Their relationship blossomed into life-long love and partnership. During their courtship, in 1941, Chester was drafted and served in Civilian Public Service for more than four years as a conscientious objector to war. He and Sara Jane

were married during those years, July 2, 1944.

Chester's adult life can be summarized into several periods:

- Ethiopia Years: 1949-1967. Called to Ethiopia by Eastern Mennonite Missions, Salunga, PA, with a wife and three preschool daughters, Chester served as a pioneer missionary educator.
- Home Ministries Years: 1967-1980. Settling back in America, now with eight children, Chester directed the home ministries and evangelism program at EMM, working with new and existing congregations from Maine to Florida.
- Pastoring Years: 1981-1991. Chester became pastor of North End Mennonite Church which had relocated outside the city of Lancaster. He and Sara Jane were instrumental in renaming the congregation as Blossom Hill Mennonite Church and revitalizing congregational life.
- Active Retirement: 1991-2020. Chester stayed energetically engaged in church, education, business, gardening & vineyard, and family activities.

These life-long interests and commitments provide another lens to frame a portrait of Chester's life.

Church – Near the core of Chester's life was the work of the Mennonite Church in the mission of God. He was ordained to Christian ministry when invited to serve in Ethiopia. He enjoyed recalling the testimonies of new faith in Jesus Christ from Ethiopian students, and provided leadership alongside Ethiopians during the birth of the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia, which is today the largest Mennonite-related church in the world. He completed a Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA, and pursued doctoral work in religious education (ABD) at New York University & Seminary. He generously donated time and money to many church-related schools and ministries. He and Sara Jane became advocates for inclusion of persons with same-sex orientation in the church. He remained active at Blossom Hill Mennonite until his death.

Education – Chester was a catalyst for starting schools. This was his gift and passion. These training centers in Ethiopia included the Dresser Bible School for nurse aides, the Good Shepherd School for missionary children, and the Nazareth Bible Academy – a highly regarded secondary school. In the USA, Chester initiated the Paul-Timothy mentoring program, founded the Keystone Bible Institute, and directed Student & Young Adult Services for Mennonite students in eastern urban settings. He served for many years on the Board of Eastern Mennonite University who honored him and Sara Jane with EMU's Centennial Award in 2017.

Business – Chester invested himself in numerous businesses after returning to the USA. This included cultivating a small family farm and vineyard. Together with his wife Sara Jane and sons, he operated flower market stands at Meadowbrook, Bird-in-Hand, and Central Market, Lancaster, PA. He was a quiet investment partner with another son in the start of Isaacs Restaurant & Deli.

Family – Chester loved his wife Sara Jane and their eight children, 16 grandchildren, and 25 great-grandchildren. He enjoyed games of competition from croquet to Bible quizzes to volleyball. He loved the seashore and was happy to rent a family beach house annually for 35 years so the next generations could delight in the same. Nothing filled him with as much joy as a cappella family four-part singing with gusto, sometimes around the piano. To the end of his life he remained curious about the latest family news from children, in-laws, grandchildren, and beyond.

Chester and Sara Jane's family: (1) Betty Wenger Good-White (Nelson Good, deceased 7/13/2005, Donald White): Ryan Good (Hannah Dueck), Naomi and Ira Good; Deborah Good (Russell James); Jason Good (Bryn Mullet Good),

James and Mara Good. (2) Margaret Wenger Johnson (Samuel Charles Johnson, deceased 8/7/2017): Bartholomew Johnson (Christina Burger Johnson), Sara and Anele (Annie) Johnson; Hannah Wenger Johnson. (3) Jewel (Wenger) Showalter (Richard Showalter, deceased 12/14/2019): Chester David (Chad) Showalter (Deborah Shenk Showalter), Rachel, Jonathan, Nicholas, Jamie, and Hannah Showalter; Rhoda Showalter Miller (Keith Miller), Jadon, David, Michael, and Andrew Miller; Matthew Showalter (Colleen Miller Showalter), Joshua, Clay, Isaac, Nava, and Kenna Showalter. (4) Chester (Chet) Wenger (deceased 11/16/2001) and Hilda Shirk (Wesley Farmer). (5) Sara Wenger Shenk (Gerald Shenk): Joseph Shenk (Amina Auezova Shenk), Ari and Jacob Shenk; Timothy Kennel Shenk (Michelle Kennel Shenk), Madeleine and Lydia Kennel Shenk; Sara Margareta (Greta) Shenk Bucher (Matthew Bucher), Samuel Bucher. (6) Mark Wenger (Kathy Weaver Wenger), Regina Wenger, Charlotte Wenger Boudreau (Kyle Boudreau). (7) Philip Wenger (Steven Dinnocenti). (8) Thomas Wenger (Keiko Kuniyuki), Yuji, Emiko, and Miako Wenger.

Chester was the last surviving child of Amos D. & Anna May Wenger's seven children.

A Memorial Service will be held with timing to be announced later. A separate interment is planned for immediate family.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to Meserete Kristos College, LINK, Ethiopia, a ministry to train Ethiopian church leaders, and should be mailed to P.O. Box 1701, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.

A memoir of Chester and Sara Jane, Bearing Fruit, as told to and shaped by Deborah Good and Betty Wenger Good-White, is available by contacting Betty at bettygood@gmail.com or (202) 725-6512.

CHESTER L WENGER MEMORIAL SERVICE

The Memorial Service for Chester L. Wenger was hosted by Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, offered remotely and released on Sunday, October 18th at 2:00 p.m. It can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLd9VyU08jxcPGFdUnOR6ht9VKebdcIPR8&fbclid=IwAR3V9UBoSM_S6p3IRIPwfE4drvZ2A-WfuGtYg3L4YiQ_3x9rHaJDAi7dFeo. There was no family visitation due to covid. Condolences can be shared at <https://www.thegroffs.com/obituaries/Chester-Wenger/> . A private interment at Mellingers Mennonite Cemetery took place on Saturday, October 17th.

Tribute Wall



“ *Chester Lehman Wenger*

October 22, 2023 at 11:34 PM



“ *We appreciated being able to attend the memorial service for Chester. We found meeting with Chester and Sara Jane so helpful when we found out that our daughter was gay. Attending the support group they started for parents of gay children was so encouraging plus we gained many new friends. We need more special people like them for the healing of our world.*

Herb and Sarah Myers - November 06, 2020 at 04:56 PM



“ *We are blessed with so many memories of your parents as we shared with them in our small group and earlier in leadership at Blossom Hill. Not to mention Ethiopia memories. Soon after Chester became pastor at Blossom Hill some new families with teenage children started attending. Our two sons were also young teens. Chester encouraged this group of youth to attend a baptism class together and be baptized. That was foundational for them. That guidance and caring from him was very special to us as parents. We needed that support at that crucial time in their lives. In our small group, we would look a scripture together, and often Chester would sum up our discussion with wise words. We could expect that from him because of his familiarity with the Word and the spirit within him. We thank God for Chester's life and we pray or comfort and peace for all the family. Mamo and Mary Ellen Dula*

Mamo and Mary Ellen Dula - October 30, 2020 at 03:48 PM

PB

“ Sara, Betty, Phil, Mark, Tom, Joe, Tim, Greta, and all the Wenger clan — the “service” brought back so many memories to me of this giant of a man who was your father and grandfather. From the roasted corn and green back yard, to the trampoline, to his twinkling blue eyes, and his big and openly welcoming heart. What a tribute he was to what humanity can be! Thanks for all the work that went into the memorial service; I was deeply moved. I remember how instrumental he was as an interested board member in moving EMU to back young Nelson Good’s brash plan to start the WSSY program in DC. It was neither the first nor the last “project” he helped bring into the world, but for me and many others it was a life changing one. And reflecting on all the institutions and movements he courageously and creatively birthed in East Africa, at EMBMC, at EMU, in his backyard, and in Lancaster Conference, to say nothing at all of the creative and engaged children he raised and nurtured, I am reminded of how remarkable a man was Chester Wenger. Please know that your fondness for him, and all that he stood for and lived for, is shared by so many of us he touched with his gentle and committed spirit over the years, welcoming us to the kitchen table of his heart. He will always have a special place in mine. Phil Baker-Shenk

Phil Baker-Shenk - October 25, 2020 at 09:36 PM

RJ

To the Wenger family. I remember Chester showing me the place in the old Jacob and Hannah Breneman Wenger house where there was once a wall behind which the family hid their grain from soldiers during the civil war. He embraced and embodied the past while he strode into the future in so many creative ways. His example blesses us all!

Ruth Stoltzfus Jost - October 26, 2020 at 10:49 PM

CM

“ Betty, Ryan, Deborah, and Jason, and the Wenger clan, Thank you for sharing Chester with us. Watching your father/grandfather's memorial made me realize how significant it was for him to be involved in your baptisms at Community House Church, which is my primary memory of him. Thank you for sharing the memorial service in a way that many could participate in remembering him. It was a moving autobiography of an inspiring man. Peace to each of you.

Cheryl Martin - October 25, 2020 at 06:55 PM

AW

“ Margaret Johnson,

Dave and I wish wish you peace and a good supportive time with your family and close firends, as you grieve the loss of your father. I often heard of your father when we lived in Pennsylvania and knew he was highly respected in the Mennonite Church.

Arlene Wiens

Arlene G. Wiens - October 22, 2020 at 03:07 PM

LG

“ We “attended” the memorial service for Chester. It was well-done. It was a blessing to see the whole family and hear your words of appreciation for him. Blessings. Leon and Elaine Good

Leon and Elaine Good - October 20, 2020 at 04:10 PM

GB

“Ruthann and I greatly appreciated Chester's memorial service. It was a fitting tribute and farewell to a truly exceptional person. We have good memories of the trip with the Wenger family to the Holy Land. Thanks for including us. Our best wishes to each of you in the family as you embrace this loss and find renewed energy to carry on an outstanding legacy. George Brunk III

George and Ruthann Miller Brunk - October 20, 2020 at 12:53 PM

SM

“Watching the Memorial service for Chester was a blessing indeed. I have had the honor of seeing him, and Sara Jane until 2018, on my visits to PA. Their love and prayers have meant a lot to me.

This year in August, I appreciated seeing Chester and am grateful for Betty having driven him over to the family home the evening I was there. His words of encouragement and blessing have been important as I live and work here in Chad.

What magnificent pillars of FAITH and LOVE - Chester and Sara Jane.

Sri Mayasandra

Sri Mayasandra - October 20, 2020 at 12:52 PM

KK

“Sending condolences to you and the entire Wenger family. I shall treasure the memories of your wedding day and the eloquence of Chet's blessings for your union. Your father was not only a pillar of the church but also a leader of faith within the Mennonite community. Kathleen Kuzmiak

Kathleen Kuzmiak - October 19, 2020 at 12:49 PM

SS

“ Tears streaming as I am profoundly awed by this transdemic man! Born in the midst of the 1918 pandemic and died during the 2020 pandemic and had such a beautiful life. Always an inspiration to me and I am proud to have known him as a neighbor for many years!

steve shenk - October 18, 2020 at 07:32 PM

LW

“ I would like to add my deepest condolences to you and family. As you celebrate the life of your dear father, may you be blessed forever with the glory of his life. With Sympathy, Linda Watson

Linda Watson - October 18, 2020 at 06:30 PM

EM

“ Warmest bonds of love to all the family.
What an inspiring hour of memories and hope.

We cherish all of you! -- Earl and Pat Hostetter Martin

Earl and Pat Martin - October 18, 2020 at 04:35 PM

IA

“ I fondly recall a conversation I had with Chester at Gourmet Group a couple of years ago. He spoke about his years in Ethiopia and I asked about the historic national and world events he had witnessed in his lifetime. Fascinating! He was truly a remarkable man.

The world was lucky to have him. My condolences to his family and friends.

Irene Anthony

Irene Anthony - October 17, 2020 at 06:59 AM

“ Dear Sara, and Family of Chester Wenger:

On behalf of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, I want to send the love of this entire community to you as you mourn your father and celebrate the gift of his life.

At age 102, Chester had few peers left in this world, even as he related closely to his Christian friends and his family across generations. We are witnesses to a generation that is leaving us; a generation who modeled, with profound conviction, that true joy is found in giving one's life to service in God's mission to reconcile all things in Jesus.

It is inspiring to review Chester's and Sara Jane's life of service in Ethiopia, in broader church ministry, and to their local congregation. It is not surprising to read, alongside a life of service in the church, a passion for farming, business, and growing flowers. It is all work expressed in growth, creativity, sustenance, and bringing beauty into the world. This impulse was expressed in the witness of your parents who understood that leaves are always being added to the banquet table of our Lord, where all are welcomed to live in the light of Christ's boundless love.

At AMBS, we are grateful for the new opportunity we have to participate in the Wenger legacy by providing graduate level theological education at the Meserete Kristos College in Ethiopia, an arrangement negotiated by President Emerita, Sara Wenger Shenk. It is a gift to have the opportunity to build on the foundational educational work that was begun in Ethiopia many years ago. We are grateful for all that we have received from Chester in support of our mission at AMBS, to educate followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world.

May the peace of God's Spirit comfort you in this time of loss. And may our shared hope in the resurrection to new life turn your grief into fullness of joy, as you remember the faithful witness of your

parents.

Shalom,

*David Boshart, President
Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary*

David Boshart - October 15, 2020 at 08:57 PM

MN

“ *To Chester’s family and friends~
Through the years I have heard numerous stories of Chester and
his family and can only imagine the culmination of all these as you
remember and honor his life. May they bring you peace.*
Marjorie Nafziger

Marjorie Nafziger - October 14, 2020 at 10:25 PM

RJ

“ *Raymond L. Jackson*



Raymond L. Jackson - October 14, 2020 at 02:00 PM

LG

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Larry Paul Gingrich - October 09, 2020 at 11:59 AM

DA

“ Greetings in the name of Lord Jesus the Christ.
The name 'Chester Wenger' has been in my brain since I started reading the history of MKC.
I was not fortunate to meet him physically but i was informed about him from books and documents.
He and his friends have paid the highest price during difficult times to help my nation know Jesus Christ. I have been reminded the amount of price paid by missionaries like Chester Wenger in serving others throughout their life.
Personally, it reminds me what Jesus has said in John 4:38
“I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”
(NIV)
Chester and his friends had done the hard work, i and my friends have been reaping the benefits of their labor.
Therefore, though words can't explain my deepest sorrows, please accept my condolences on behalf of MKC. I pray for his family, brothers and sisters for God's comfort.
Finally, thank you Chester for your life time commitment, concern and care for us !
see you later, till then, rest in peace !!!❤️❤️❤️

Desalegn Abebe, (President, MKC

Desalegn Abebe - October 07, 2020 at 11:33 PM

KB

“ A good, long life and a goodly, Godly heritage! I am blessed to have known Chester and Sara Jane, and to know many of their children. May you be comforted by happy memories and inspired to carry on the good work in the church, your communities, and our world.
Kaye Brubaker

Kaye Brubaker - October 07, 2020 at 12:06 PM

WL

“ I remember one evening in 1963 when this large family came for supper. Dad and Mom explained that this was the Chester Wenger family and those kids were my 2nd cousins. Afterward, my sister and I learned that Chester and Sara Jane were on the lookout for prospective dorm parents for the newly forming Good Shepherd School in Ethiopia. Following a year of deliberation, my parents accepted that call and Good Shepherd School / Ethiopia became my new home. For this rich experience I am most grateful.

Wayne Lehman

Wayne R Lehman - October 07, 2020 at 09:15 AM

HB

“ I first met Chester when I was working in Ethiopia with the MCC group from 1949-52. Joe (deceased 2018) and I are in the large group picture. He's the tallest one in the back row and I'm just in front of him. Must have been taken shortly after our marriage February 1956. I remember his hard work during a time of transition. I have happy memories of those early days. Condolences to the family.

Helen (Witmer) Burkholder

Helen Burkholder - October 06, 2020 at 02:39 PM

LG

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



Larry Paul Gingrich - October 06, 2020 at 12:12 AM

LG

“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



Larry Gingrich - October 06, 2020 at 12:00 AM

LG

“ THANKS Betty, Margaret, Jewel, Chet (so missed), Sara, Mark, Phil and Tom for sharing your precious father/daddy with us other Mennonite missionary kids as we grew up together in Ethiopia back in the 1950's and 60's.



Uncle Chester was and continues to be an example of dignified gentle conviction and strength and I feel grateful to have benefited from his life all of my years.

Deep comfort and grace to all of you as you remember and rejoice in the amazingly well lived life of Chester.

Our world is greatly diminished in so many ways with his passing, but the legacy of all of you carries Chester's influence on with waves of positive energy and good will.

Warmly and With Much Love,
Larry Paul Gingrich

Larry Gingrich - October 05, 2020 at 11:54 PM

DM

“ Condolences from Nancy and me. Phil your father obviously led an interesting life and was a wonderful influence on yours.
Dave Myer

DAVID L MYER - October 05, 2020 at 07:59 PM

GK

“ I attended the Bible Academy a school Chester founded. I met Chester years later. We served on a board together. I am grateful for his love of Ethiopia and the work he did among my people. MKC lost a great friend. We will remember Chester.

Grum Ketema

Grum Ketema - October 05, 2020 at 01:31 PM

CC

“ To Phil and Family! I remember your Dad and Mom well. They were amazing people with an amazing life!! My condolences to you all!! Love and Hugs...

Cheri Kendig Crouse - October 04, 2020 at 09:18 PM

SH

“ Dear Phil and Steve,
Sending you heartfelt condolences and a BIG hug,
Stefanie Valar and Ed Hauck

Stefanie Valar and Ed Hauck - October 04, 2020 at 05:39 PM

NH

“ I am grateful for Chester's life, a person who never stopped growing in love and knowledge! I remember in particular how my father Wilmer Heisey, of blessed memory, spoke with great appreciation of his work with Chester in the development and promotion of Keystone Bible Institutes.

Nancy Heisey - October 04, 2020 at 07:57 AM

TM

“ I met Mr. Wenger in July 2009 at the Bible Academy reunion in the Washington DC area. He was with Sara Jane and his daughter Jewel. I was so impressed with his love for the BA and was asking how he can help us re establish the school. His enthusiasm and desire to see a new BA academy left a big impression on me.



It is because of him, his wife and other supporters' obedience to the Lord that so many of us who attended the BA benefited. I believe Mr. Wenger and his team established one of the best private high school in Ethiopia. So thankful!!!

Tony Mehari - October 04, 2020 at 06:43 AM

LS

“ It is impossible to encapsulate such a remarkable life in a few words. Pat and I will cherish memories of conversations with Chester and Sara, their obvious love for each other and their family, and deep commitment to the church. Chester was a role model for leaders who would challenge the church to be better.

I particularly enjoyed hearing stories from Chester from his years as a young man when his father was president of Eastern Mennonite School (later College and University). He had a front row seat (literally) when he drove his father to many external appointments.

He and Sara were unfailingly supportive of the next generation of leaders, keenly aware of current events, intensely interested in so many subjects-which made for engaging conversations.

We enjoyed a great visit to Ethiopia in 2003 where we connected with many church leaders whose lives had been directly or indirectly influenced by Chester and Sara years earlier. What a legacy!

Blessings to the family as you grieve a generation gone and share warm memories.

Loren Swartzendruber - October 03, 2020 at 08:19 AM