



## William Edward Diehl

May 30, 2021

William Edward Diehl passed away peacefully on May 30, 2021 at Luther Crest in Allentown. Born February 5, 1925, he was the son of Hilda (Yellis) Diehl and Henry Diehl. He was married to his beloved wife, Judith Ruhe Diehl for 68 years, with whom he shared a deep commitment to family, faith, and service to others.

A product of the Allentown Public Schools, he served in the Second World War and then enrolled in Lehigh University, graduating summa cum laude with a Civil Engineering Degree. He joined Bethlehem Steel, where he worked for 32 years as a civil engineer, salesperson, and manager. He retired in 1981 after being Manager of Sales for the company for eleven years. But his career was hardly done. He founded Riverbend Resource Center, doing management consulting for profit and non-profit organizations and serving on the Board of Directors and as Interim President for Barker Steel in Boston.

But more important to him than his business career was his family, his deep Christian faith, and his unfaltering quest to live his faith in all that he did. Bill often attributed his service in World War II to shaping these priorities having served in the European Theater as a combat medic with a tank battalion and later witnessing the unspeakable brutality of human existence as he helped to liberate concentration camps. These experiences, though rarely discussed, led to a deep examination of what he was called to do with his life. This calling

manifested itself in promulgating the critical role of the laity in the life of society and in a commitment to civil rights, social justice and the rights and dignity of all people.

For over 30 years, Bill was a leader in the Lutheran Lay Movement, organizing numerous study groups, conferences and retreats. In addition to many articles he wrote, his books included *Christianity and Real Life*; *Thank God, It's Monday!* and *In Search of Faithfulness* (published by Fortress Press); and *It Ain't Over Till It's Over*, co-authored with wife Judith (Augsburg Books).

He was a lay member of the National Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and he served on the Commission for a New Lutheran Church. He also was on the Board of Directors for the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. He was a leader in the National Institute for Lay Training and, for nine years, was the President of Lutheran Academy.

As a member of the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in Emmaus, he was Board Member/Founder for the Center for Faith and Life, and chairperson for the Ministry in Daily Life Committee. Bill also served as a member of the Justice and Advocacy Committee for the Lehigh County Conference of Churches,

Bill and Judith gave generously of their time and resources to efforts that exemplified the Gospel directives to take care of others less fortunate. They did volunteer work for multiple human service and church agencies. They helped to sponsor refugee families, including German families after World War II, as well as Cuban, Indian, Ugandan, and Vietnamese families. At various times, Bill served on or chaired many Boards of Directors, including the United Way in Lehigh Valley; Lehigh Valley Community Council; Lehigh Valley Legal Services; Community Treatment Center; Lehigh County Housing Authority; Interfaith Coalition on Poverty in the Lehigh Valley; and the Interfaith Coalition

on Ethics in the Lehigh Valley. Even in his later years, he continued his service by founding the Justice and Advocacy Network at LutherCrest, and by driving for Meals on Wheels.

When times called for more activism, Bill and Judith stepped forth together, including challenging racial segregation when living on Philadelphia's "Main Line," joining protest marches against the Vietnam war and successfully pressing the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America to urge all 6,000 churches to urge prayers and discussion about the war.

Bill -- along with Judith -- was honored in 1993 with the Jack P. Houlihan Community Volunteer Award from the United Way of the Greater Lehigh. In recognition of his life's work, he was awarded several honorary degrees, including an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters by Wartburg College.

Bill was also a devoted husband who adored Judith and wrote poems for her birthdays and every Christmas. His children are grateful for his example of his high moral and ethical standards, and his living a devout and socially activist life. His grandchildren remember him fondly, including playing bridge and shuffleboard with him at the family's summer home in the Poconos and the elaborate train set (a Pennsylvania Dutch Putz) he set up every Christmas.

No tribute would be complete without a nod to his Pennsylvania Dutch heritage which manifested itself in many of his jokes, his membership in a local Groundhog Lodge, his love of scrapple and Lebanon bologna and his multi-percussion Boom-pah.

Bill was pre-deceased by his wife, Judith, his parents, and his beloved grandson Brendan Rackley and granddaughter, Rebecca Geballe. Survivors include: his children – Shelley Geballe (Gordon) of Branford, Connecticut;

William A. Diehl (Jeanne Birdsall) of Northampton, MA; Georgia Rackley of Enola, PA; and Jennifer Welborn (Carlos Gradil) of Amherst, MA. He is also survived by nine grandchildren – Joshua (Allison), Benjamin (Rachel), and Daniel (Linda) Geballe; David (Allison) and Amy (Tim Carlson) Diehl; Nicholas (Laura) Rackley; and Kelsey and Jesse Welborn, as well as 13 great-grandchildren – William, Kaylee, Shai, Avi, Micah, Ezra, Mealea, Oscar, Edward, Quinn, Elliott, and Henry. His entire family is deeply grateful for his ninety-six years of love and devotion, and for being such an inspiring example of a spiritual, caring and impactful life.

Because of continuing COVID restrictions, his children will gather for a private service and then hold a memorial celebration of Bill's life by family and friends later.

In lieu of flowers, please consider contributions to the William E. and Judith Ruhe Diehl Scholarship Fund at Muhlenberg College 2400 Chew Street, Allentown, PA 18014-5586]

# Cemetery Details

## **Greenwood Cemetery**

2010 W. Chew St.  
Allentown, PA 18104

# Tribute Wall

DG

“ Bill and Judith Diehl were an inspiration to all who knew them. I was able to use some of Bill's publications in my parish ministry. At Luther Crest I was supported in editing th Crest Chronicle by Judth's excellent proofreading. As we delivered mail to his room prior to COVID-19, Bill always had a comment to share. We send our best wishes to all the family knowing that God' peace will sustain you.  
Rev David and Barbara Godshall

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**David Godshall** - May 31, 2021 at 02:06 PM

MC

“ I met Bill through the Ministry in Daily Life Committee and worked with him and other board members for several years. Bill was committed to his faith and believed that our faith is important in everything we do, including the work God calls us to. He believed that we are ordained to our work in our baptism. My life was made richer by knowing and working with Bill. God Speed my friend. Rev. Matilda Chase, Bangor. PA

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**Matilda Chase** - May 31, 2021 at 07:55 AM

DE

“ *Bill and Judith were a remarkable couple. We worshiped with both at the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Emmaus, PA., where I also served with them on the Center for Faith and Life and Ministry in Daily Life Committee's. We often met in their home which they so graciously made available to us. When they moved to Luther Crest, my wife and I would meet with them for lunch in the cafeteria. Upon Judith's passing, Bill and I would continue to meet to discuss his life and Ministry in Daily Life. Bill was a larger than life inspiration to me, both as a role model for his servant hood and in his introducing me to the concept of what it means to be a minister in our daily lives, we miss you already Bill as we have continued to miss Judith. May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding safely guide and enfold you in your next journey. Dave Evans*

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**david evans** - May 31, 2021 at 06:14 AM