

Pastor Wayne Pence to Retire Dec. 31

“Great way to spend your life.”

--Pastor Wayne Pence



(Photo courtesy of Wayne Pence)

This fall, Mountain View Fellowship Pastor J. Wayne Pence announced his plans to retire at the end of the month. After serving all 43 years of his ministry in the Shenandoah District, Wayne has some great stories to tell. For instance, how did a simple, shy young boy who grew up on his family's farm in Rockingham County become a pastor, farmer and church planter?

Wayne's transformation began as he grew up on the farm that has been in his family since 1856. He worshipped with the Mill Creek congregation, where his grandfather had been an elder in the free ministry. As a teenager, Wayne was selected with five other young men to help Pastor Earl Mitchell, serving mostly as worship leaders. These experiences, together with time spent in FFA in high school, were foundational to overcoming his shyness and learning how to speak to groups. Eventually, Wayne became the FFA state president, where he further developed the confidence and leadership skills that later helped his ministry.

“Looking back, I can see that I couldn't have been a pastor without those early formative experiences,” Wayne observed. “One thing led to another, and it's all been good. We take one step, then look as far down the road as we can see and take another step.”

After high school, Wayne attended Bridgewater College and transferred to Virginia Tech to complete his bachelor's degree in agriculture education. After graduating, he worked as a vocational agriculture teacher in Frederick County, splitting time between Robert E. Aylor and Frederick County middle schools. Two years later, he and Ramona (Mona), who taught at nearby Cline Elementary School, were married and began attending Calvary Church of the Brethren. There they helped establish a young adult group.

Wayne's call to the ministry did not happen overnight. He remembers feeling the call during his high school years, which was affirmed by his pastor through serving at Mill Creek. Back then, Wayne had an image of ministry that included pastors having to wear a suit all the time and transferring between congregations every few years. That was not something he thought he could do and preserve his family's farm. As he wrestled with his perceptions, he recalls God asking if he could be both a part-time pastor and farmer. With this new possibility in mind, he approached Stanley Wampler, the district

executive at that time. Stanley was excited that Wayne would be willing to pastor a smaller church as a part-time minister. Wayne and Mona then made the decision to move to the Chicago suburbs where he could attend Bethany Theological Seminary.

That April, Wayne and Mona did not renew their teaching contracts. Within approximately one month after making that decision, Wayne's father had a stroke and spent his remaining three years in a wheelchair. That event called into question whether they should move away. As an only child, Wayne did not want to leave his mother and father alone to deal with this challenging health crisis. Yet, he felt called to give seminary a try, and he and Mona moved forward with their plans. Wayne recalls how God provided for his family while they were away. Sadly, his father died three years later, just one month before Wayne graduated. This loss was closely followed by the birth of their oldest daughter, Monica, who was born on his graduation day. Wayne eventually made it to the graduation ceremony, but Mona did not!

After graduation, Wayne and Mona moved back to Rockingham County to be with their families. Wayne followed his inspiration to serve part-time by becoming the pastor at Pine Grove. He spent almost 11 years there, from 1977 through 1988, dividing his time between pastoring and raising dairy heifers on his farm. His family grew, too, as they welcomed their son, Jonah. Then, an opening with the Lebanon congregation came along, and he spent about 80% of his time pastoring and the remainder farming. Their youngest child, Natalie, was born one year after he began at Lebanon. He served as pastor of the Lebanon congregation for nearly 17 years, from 1988 through 2004.

Perhaps, his most compelling story is how God established Mountain View Fellowship. In 1992, the Shenandoah District established the New Church Development Committee with the goal of exploring opportunities for planting churches. Wayne has always had an interest in church planting, so he volunteered to be on the committee and served for 25 years.

Eastern Rockingham County did not have a Brethren congregation, but they found a few people who had moved into the area, or retired nearby, so they started a home Bible study group in January 1998. As the group began to grow, they needed more space. Mona's father suggested the old Town Hall in McGaheysville. The Ruritans owned the building and were willing to rent it for a modest sum. They met two Sunday evenings a month for the first few years, and area churches helped with the worship services. Later, it became evident there was a need to begin Sunday morning worship services. Through a series of coincidences within 24 hours, Wayne was led to consider working part-time for both congregations. Then District Executive Jim Miller allowed him to explore this option. In God's providence, the Lebanon congregation approved cutting Wayne's hours back to half-time and hired Jonathan Brush and Randy Simmons at quarter-time each so that Wayne could help establish the church in McGaheysville. Wayne became the pastor of Mountain View Fellowship on January 1, 2001, serving half-time through 2004. Then he resigned from Lebanon and served solely with Mountain View Fellowship.

After four years, the congregation was ready to move into a building program. Providentially, a couple in the congregation attending Annual Conference in Peoria, Ill., stumbled onto something on their way to the conference. As they were traveling through Joplin, Mo., they saw a group of volunteers building a church. They returned and excitedly told Wayne about the possibility of having those volunteers build their church. Wayne discovered those volunteers were Baptists and assumed they would not help a Brethren congregation. Undaunted, the couple had someone write an appeal letter, which was not even addressed to the right place, but somehow arrived. Representatives from the Baptist volunteer organization, Carpenters for Christ, reached out to Mountain View Fellowship for an interview. A few weeks later, they said, "God told us to help you build your church." The following June, 80 men and boys had the building under roof within 10 days. Wayne remembers this period of time as being an "awesome" experience: "God did it!"

The next chapter in Wayne's story is retirement. Wayne commented that it comes at the perfect time. It marks "exactly 20 years of service at Mountain View Fellowship, the mortgage has been paid and I'll be 72 years old." In retirement, Wayne intends to record the history of the founding of the church as one of his first projects. What he is looking forward to most is "not having to write a sermon every week." He laughs, "It's really hard to do one every week for 43 years. It's just hard work!"

Wayne's future plans are to work on the farm, cleaning out old buildings and fixing fences. He savors the idea of being outside, working at his own pace. As chairman of the District Leadership Team, Wayne also hopes to be able to visit area churches.

For those considering ministry, Wayne says, "You need to feel a sense of calling. One person may encounter the Holy Spirit in one moment, and another may feel a calling over 10 or 20 years. You have to have that 'holy hunch.'" He also says that pastors need to have a heart for people and care about their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. "People have to come first," he said. Theology is important, he emphasized, "but a pastor has to want to see someone who is struggling and watch how God can help them grow and change when He gets a hold of them."

Wayne's favorite memories from his four decades of ministry are of the churches he served. He remembers having "good experiences" because he pastored "good people." Reflecting over his career, he said, "It was a great way to spend your life." Indeed.

Send an email note to [Pastor Wayne Pence](#)

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Shenandoah Update:
A Newsletter of the Shenandoah District
Church of the Brethren
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