



Obituary: The Rev. Royal F. Shepard Jr.



The Rev. Royal F. Shepard Jr.

The Rev. Royal F. Shepard Jr., 91, died on Tuesday, April 9, 2019 at Mountainside Medical Center in Montclair, the same hospital where he was born.

Mr. Shepard was a United Church of Christ (Congregationalist) minister, author and served for several years as Montclair Township historian.

He was born in 1927 to Royal F. Shepard and Adelaide K. Denk. Known as “Roy” or “Shep” to his friends, he

grew up mostly in Montclair and New York City, but also lived for a time in Hopewell Junction, N.Y., in the Catskills. Here he attended a one-room school, immersed himself in books and nature study, and roamed through the woods and fields with his cousin Charlie. He later attended Trinity School in Manhattan and graduated from Montclair High School.

As a teen, he became deeply interested in religion, joining the Society of Friends (Quakers). At age 16, he met Georgianna "Jana" Burch at a friend's home in Manhattan. They were married in 1949, shortly after he graduated from Haverford College, where he studied philosophy.

His college studies were interrupted for a period when he traveled to Mexico with the American Friends Service Committee, helping to build a well for a rural school serving indigenous people. After graduating from Haverford, he earned a master's degree from Columbia University Teachers College and taught high school English for a year. He then enrolled in Union Theological Seminary, becoming an ordained minister in 1954.

Mr. Shepard served as United Church of Christ minister at churches in Neligh, Neb., Watertown, Wis., Sacramento, Calif., Duluth, Minn., and Wayne. He was also interim/exchange minister for churches in upstate New York, Michigan, and Bath, England. While in Sacramento, he earned a doctorate of theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

A gifted writer and orator, he was widely appreciated for his sermons where he mused over diverse themes from Yankees games to the works of Reinhold Niebuhr. An admirer of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., he frequently advocated from the pulpit for the civil rights movement and joined marches in Sacramento in the 1960s. In 1980, he traveled to Cuba with a group of clergymen as part of an effort to secure freedom of religion. Mr. Shepard's sermons are available from the website of the Pilgrim Congregational Church of Duluth at pilgrimduluth.org/history.

In 1992, he and Jana retired to his hometown, Montclair, and he became the township historian. They also enjoyed their summer cottage in the Berkshires and later, an apartment at Crane's Mill in West Caldwell.

His published works include "Seeking the Mind of Christ," a daily devotional, and the novel "The Latest Epistle of Jim," which won the 1995 Mid-List Press Award. But he reached his stride with his poetry, winning several awards and publishing in journals such as Poetry, Poem and Nimrod. His last published poetry collection, "Veery Song," won the Comstock Review Award in 2013. The work is a loving reminiscence of his wife Jana, from their first meeting as teens to her slow decline in a dementia unit.

Mr. Shepard is survived by his children, Alice Roth and her husband, Donald of Lenox, Mass.; Melanie Shepard and her husband, Alan Netland of Duluth, Minn.; Roy Shepard of St. Louis, Mo., and Elizabeth Shepard of Montclair; six grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

A memorial celebration will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 27, at Crane's Mill in Hinman Hall at 459 Passaic Ave., West Caldwell.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association at act.alz.org or the Montclair History Center at montclairhistory.org.



Christmas worship in Montclair



The Presbyterian Church of Montclair is decorated for Christmas. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTLAIR LOCAL

Christmas in Montclair is celebrated throughout the township at many different houses of worship. Here are some local pageants, choir concerts and other holiday events:

United Church of Christ, 40 South Fullerton Ave., is holding a Longest Night Service this evening at 8, to acknowledge the difficult emotions of the seasons. There will be readings, music and a time to pray individually with the pastors. Also an option to receive an anointing with oil and a labyrinth walk. On Sunday,

Dec 24, during the service, there will be a Children's Christmas Medley performance.

Grace Presbyterian Church, 153 Grove St., is hosting an All-Church Christmas Carol Sing accompanied by the Grace Family Ensemble at 9 a.m., Dec. 24. Carols and hymns of the season will be sung in the Fellowship Hall.

St. Luke's Church, 73 South Fullerton Ave., is hosting Christmas Dinner at 11:30 a.m. Dec. 25 after the 10 a.m. service. St. Luke's food ministry and Toni's Kitchen are serving meals to anyone who attends, regardless of need or circumstances.

Immaculate Conception, 30 North Fullerton Ave., is holding a few Christmas Eve concerts on Sunday. There will be a children's choir at 4 p.m., a youth choir at 6 p.m. and the Immaculate Conception Chancel Choir and Gramercy Brass Quintet conducted by Preston Dibble at 10 p.m. A Mass will follow at 10:30 p.m. On Christmas Day at 10:30 a.m., the Immaculate Conception Chancel Choir will perform.

First Lutheran Church, 153 Park St., will hold a worship service at 10:15 a.m. Dec. 24. Children's worship is at 4:30 p.m. A service crafter for children ages 10 and under. Events include a "Little Drummer Boy" parade, "The Christmas Story," and the giving of ornaments. Family worship at 7:30 p.m. Christmas carols will be sung for the service music. There will be a candlelight Silent Night at 10:30 p.m.; the Lutheran version of a Midnight Mass.