



# Douglas Oldenburg

FEB 22, 1935 - JUL 21, 2020



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## **Douglas Oldenburg**

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**D**avidson--Douglas W. Oldenburg, former senior minister of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Charlotte and progressive leader in the Presbyterian Church-USA, died on July 21, 2020. He was 85 years old.

Skilled in the art of diplomacy, blessed with an unerring sense of right and wrong, and coupled with his genuine affection for those with whom he worked, Oldenburg was admired by the congregations and staff of the churches he served, the faculty and students of the seminary he led, and many, many others.

Oldenburg was born on February 22, 1935 in Muskegon, Michigan, son of Frederika Nordoff and Theodore Oldenburg, who, as a small child, immigrated from Amsterdam, Netherlands to the United States.

At age eleven, Oldenburg moved to Signal Mountain, Tennessee to a street where his future wife, Claudia, lived. Their childhood friendship grew into a love that lasted for 63 years.

He was in the first graduating class of Myers Park High School in Charlotte where he was president of the student body. At Davidson College, he was a member of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, sang in the Male Chorus, and earned a B.A. degree in English. An officer in the ROTC, he was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the US Army and served for a short time as an officer in Armor and later transferred to the Chaplaincy as a Captain in the Army Reserve.

Oldenburg entered Union Theological Seminary where he earned a B.D. degree and won a Fellowship that took him to Yale Divinity School and a S.T.M. degree.

His first pastorate was to develop a new church in Lynchburg, Virginia. While there, he was instrumental in starting the Kum Ba Ya House for disadvantaged children in the city. After seven years, he moved to Davis Memorial Presbyterian Church in Elkins, West Virginia. While in Elkins,



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he headed the support for a city-wide referendum to raise teacher salaries that had been defeated three times previously. This effort passed with an impressive 60 percent of the vote.

In 1972, at age thirty-seven, Oldenburg was called to be the senior minister of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Always concerned with helping the poor and with Christian faith and economic justice, he continued to study economics related to Christian life. He helped to establish Crisis Assistance Ministry, was a member of the Charlotte Housing Authority, and was co-founder of The Presbyterian Family Life Center. During his 14 years of service in Charlotte, he led a successful Presbytery-wide ten-year massive self-help project to assist a village in Haiti in a long-term effort to improve the quality of life there. He served on the Board of Trustees of St. Andrews Presbyterian College, Union Theological Seminary and Agnes Scott College. Active in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and always advocating to improve race relations, he received the Martin Luther King, Jr. award and Charlotte's Order of the Hornet.

In 1987 he left Charlotte to undertake a new challenge as the seventh president of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Under his leadership, the seminary rose to prominence and was known for its excellent faculty and progressive thinking. During his tenure, the endowment was raised from \$27 million to \$155 million and a capital campaign raised more than \$34 million. He was instrumental in overseeing significant building and landscaping improvements at the seminary. Upon his retirement, the beautiful, new campus center was given the name of The Oldenburg Quadrangle.

He served his Presbyterian church through many committees in the General Assembly, the Synods, the Presbyteries and in the communities where he lived. He was most proud of his work on "A Declaration of Faith" for the denomination that is used in many worship services today.

During his years in the Atlanta area, he was a member of the Atlanta Rotary Club and was instrumental in coordinating relationships between the presidents of all the seminaries of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

He was elected to be Moderator of the 2.6-million member Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1998. During his term, he emphasized a theme of concern for hungry children in the USA and in the world.



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He has been awarded honorary degrees from Davis and Elkins Presbyterian College, St. Andrews University, Davidson College, Hastings College, Presbyterian College, The Reformed Theological Academy in Budapest, Hungary and Rhodes College.

After retirement from the seminary in 2000, he and his wife moved to their beloved home on Lake Davidson north of Charlotte. He loved working in his yard, going to the Charlotte Symphony, attending Davidson College basketball games, and convening a regular meeting of retired ministers in Davidson. He also began "Advocates for Ministry" in which he and other Presbyterian ministers visited colleges and universities to encourage students to consider the ministry as their vocation.

Golf was one of Oldenburg's passions and was a game he continued to enjoy at Charlotte Country Club where he played into his late 70's. He was well-traveled and visited 45 countries, some of those several times.

He is survived by his wife, Claudia, their three sons: Mark, Scott, and Todd; their wives: Courtney, Leah, and Claire; and eight grandchildren: Tyce, Jack, Paige, Hap, Evan, Eli, Charlie and Isla. His family gave him much joy and pleasure.

His ashes will be placed in the Columbarium at Covenant Presbyterian Church. A virtual memorial service is scheduled for Wednesday, July 29 at 11:00AM. It can be viewed by using this link.

<https://www.covenantpresby.org/upcoming-events?sapurl=Lyt2NDZxL2xiL2V2LytwM3d2cnEyP2JyYW5kaW5nPXRYdWUmZWliZWQ9dHJlZQ==>

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to Crisis Assistance Ministry in Charlotte or the charity of your choice.

James Funeral Home of Huntersville is serving the family. [www.jamesfuneralhomeLKN.com](http://www.jamesfuneralhomeLKN.com)



# Tribute Wall

**Douglas Oldenburg**

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**David Faulkner** posted:

Hi Claudia, my cousin Bert Carmichael told me of the passing of your husband Doug. I want to express my deepest condolences to you. I remember very fondly working with you when I worked part-time at the Friendship Force. You were always so helpful and kind. I hope your sons & their families are doing well. Take care Claudia. David Faulkner

August 4 at 1:14 PM



**Donella Huffman** lit a candle in honor of Douglas.



July 29 at 6:41 PM



**John Hartman** posted:

Doug was a beloved mentor during my Student-In-Ministry year from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte in the late 1970s. He led seminars for our group one day a month. I will never forget his candor with respect to being a pastor, his thoughtful pastoral presence, and the seriousness of his personal stewardship. He pondered even small financial decisions with an eye towards prudence and faithfulness. For example, at lunch with us one day he spoke about his decision to not buy a leaf blower and to continue to use a broom because a leaf blower was such an extravagance! Thanks be to God for his life and ministry among us. His works do follow him. --Rev. Dr. John B. Hartman II, Pastor, Seneca Presbyterian Church, Seneca, SC.

July 29 at 12:17 PM



**Sarah Dyer** posted:

Doug Was such a gracious gentleman...he will be greatly missed by his Pines' family.Sarah and E.B. Dyer

July 28 at 6:35 PM



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**Rush Otey** posted:

It was a joy to meet Doug during my days as a student at Union Seminary in Richmond. While he was at Covenant in Charlotte, I was campus minister at Davidson; while he was President of Columbia Seminary, I was pastor of a nearby congregation; when he was elected Moderator of GA, I happened to be a commissioner; and since 2002 we served together again in the Presbytery of Charlotte. He was a confidant, mentor, encouraging friend, a steady and genuine pastor-theologian who profoundly had a heart for the needs of others and was never too busy to listen. One of the highlights of ministry for me was to share in the wedding service of Claire and Todd. Doug exemplified Philippians 4:4-8. May we trust the Resurrection, as he continues to share life with us in the communion of saints . Rush Otey

July 28 at 10:38 AM



**The Hillsborough Oldenburgs, Jan Thys And Lawson** sent an America the Beautiful to the Oldenburg family.



July 27 at 3:35 PM



**Bob Blalock** posted:

Claudia, I will always remember Doug as a man who lived what he believed and shared those values by example. He will sorely be missed but I feel very lucky to have known both of you. Bob

July 27 at 1:13 PM



**Gregory Pugh** shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Claudia, I have always remembered you and Doug (and Mark and Scott) with great fondness. I especially cherish memories of you leading the children's choir. Talk about herding cats. You and Doug have made the world a better place. Peace be with you during this time. Gregory Pugh, Lynchburg, VA



July 26 at 8:30 AM



**Jeff Aiken** posted:

Just a correction to my story below. Spell check got my word and misspelled anecdote. Thought I should offer a correction to that second paragraph.--Jeff Aiken

July 24 at 3:42 PM



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**Jeff Aiken** posted:

Claudia, Todd and other members of the Oldenburg family. First let me say how sorry we are to hear of Doug's death. Doug was certainly one of the most outstanding leaders in the PCUSA. He was an intellectual giant who had a huge heart for those experiencing social injustice--a gifted preacher, exemplary church statesman, pastor and friend to so many. It was always a treat to be in his presence whether hearing him as a guest preacher in churches I served, at CTS gatherings or on the golf course (getting the best of me when he was a 9 handicapper). Through his great brilliance, he could be humorous and serious at the same time. Allow me one antidote. Once when I was president of the alumni association of CTS, Doug and I were standing on the front lawn of the Columbia church waiting for the keynote speaker to arrive for the service to begin at 7:30 pm. At 10 till 8, with the congregation waiting inside, Doug was fuming saying, "I told that guy to let me send a car and driver, but he said he wanted to rent a car. I just knew he would get lost coming from the airport!" Then Doug looked at me and said, "Jeff, you know you will have to preach if he doesn't show up in the next 10 minutes." Fortunately, for both of us and the waiting congregation, the speaker arrived at 5 till 8. What a rich and full life Doug lived. Libby joins me in extending deepest sympathy to all of you. Jeff Aiken

July 24 at 2:13 PM



**Anonymous** sent a Beautiful in Blue to the Oldenburg family.



July 24 at 12:28 PM



**Karen J. McNulty** posted:

Dear Claudia, Mark, Scott and Todd. I am so sorry to hear of Doug's passing. He was a very wonderful person and will always hold a special spot in my heart. I remember fondly our early morning talks over coffee. We covered a lot of topics from religion to travel to sports, and of course his family! Sending you all my love and prayers of comfort. Much Love, Karen McNulty

July 24 at 6:29 AM



**Lucy Shearer** July 25 at 8:18 AM

Dear Scott, I had the privilege of working with you at Falls Cove for Crescent Resources in 2006-2007. Grateful to speak with your Dad when he passed on the news that a fellow Covenant church member and former boss Ken Forester has passed away. My deepest sympathies to you and your family on the loss of your father. If you wish to keep in touch you can contact me and my husband Tom through the Davidson College Presbyterian Church. In Christ's name Lucy L Shearer



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RP

**Rick Peek** posted:

Dear Claudia, Mark, Scott, and Todd, We were so sorry to hear the news of Doug's passing but are extremely grateful to have known him since 1972 when your family moved to Charlotte. His leadership at Covenant was transformative and challenged members to look beyond the campus in order to affect change in the world. My parents LOVED working with Doug and he made an indelible mark on their lives and careers at Covenant. I am also so grateful that your family welcomed me into your lives as I grew up. We are praying for you all. Rick Peek

July 24 at 6:16 AM

VW

**Vaughn J Warthen Jr** posted:

Personal encouragement, that's how Doug Oldenburg changed my life. 1976, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC, Doug and his ministry staff and session took me on as "Intern Minister With Youth". Green wasn't ever as green as I was. Doug stuck with me, encouraged me and taught me to work the work of the Church. Doug inspired everyone at Covenant to "go into all the world" because we knew Jesus' love and needed to share it. Doug's personal encouragement changed, shaped and pushed everyone to stick with God's calling. I remember him preaching a sermon titled "Interrobang"; a symbol consisting of an exclamation point inside a question mark. Doug's point was this symbol describes our faith: Where do we go next with the "!" good news of Jesus love? Jay Warthen

July 23 at 6:10 PM

NH

**Nancy Hughes** posted:

I remember Doug and his brother Ted playing their trombones on Easter sunrise service of the Signal Mountain Presbyterian church on the brow over looking Chattanooga. They played "Up From The Grave He Arose". Nancy Hughes, a long time friend

July 23 at 5:38 PM

CG

**Calvin Gittner** posted:

It was a blessing to pleasure to be a student CTS under Doug's leadership. I remember one evening when my wife, 2yr son and I were have dinner on lawn and Doug stop to talk with us. It was just a casual night - that stayed with me. Well done our good and faithful servant! Calvin Gittner, MDiv CTS 1996, DMin CTS 2006.

July 23 at 2:03 PM



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RS

**Robyn Davis Sekula** posted:

I had the opportunity to meet Doug and Claudia in 2018 when we filmed a tribute video. I thoroughly enjoyed being a guest in their home and spending time with the Oldenburgs. They were so gracious and just lovely to meet. It was clear from everything Doug said - and everything everyone said about Doug - that he was a true servant leader with little ego and a great heart for ministry. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to meet him and Claudia both. What a gift he was to the PC(USA) and the communities he served, including my hometown, Lynchburg, Va.

July 23 at 12:10 PM

BS

**Barbara Studenmund** posted:

So very sorry to hear about Doug's passing -- my family was very blessed to have you all as neighbors when we moved to Elkins. Barbara Studenmund

July 23 at 6:43 AM

PM

**Paige Maxwell Mcright** posted:

I am saddened to learn of the death of a great churchman and deeply caring human being. My condolences to his family who loved him best and shared him generously with the rest of us. The church triumphant is better off for his presence there. Paige McRight

July 22 at 3:46 PM



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SM

**Stephanie Malushizky** posted:

So very sorry to hear about Doug! What a sweet family -- all of you! May the peace of Christ and the comfort of the Holy Spirit surround you now. Stephanie Malushizky Davidson College Presbyterian Church

July 22 at 9:50 AM

RS

**Rob Stewart** July 25 at 8:08 AM

Dearest Claudia, Mark, Todd and Scott, I am so grateful for Doug's presence, guidance, encouragement and support in my life. I also greatly appreciate the privilege of knowing each of you as well. Doug's "In the Meantime" sermon will forever resonate in my memory, and I'm sure the saints are now welcoming him home. God bless each of you in the time of loss. With much love, Rob Stewart

LF

**Larry Fincher** July 23 at 8:05 AM

I was saddened to learn today that Doug has died. My mind raced back over the decades to Northside Junior High School where we first met. And, I thought about all the years since as we had occasional contact like at Chattanooga High School Reunions (where Claudia and I graduated). And, I thought of the tremendous contributions Doug made to the Presbyterian Church. Best wishes to the family in this difficult time. Larry Fincher



**Gregory Pugh** shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

July 26 at 8:30 AM



Covenant Presbyterian Church Lynchburg, VA



# Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Douglas by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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