

DON DAWSON TO RETIRE FROM WORLD MISSION INITIATIVE

The Rev. Dr. Don Dawson will retire Oct. 31, 2016, as director of the **World Mission Initiative** (WMI) at and the **New Wilmington Mission Conference** (NWMC), the oldest annual mission conference in the United States. Don has directed WMI and the conference since 2000.

“After having served as a pastor for 24 years, God surprised me, indeed ‘surprised me’ with a call to be director of the New Wilmington Mission Conference and World Mission Initiative—a missionary calling,” Don shared at the 111th New Wilmington Mission Conference in July. “What I thought I wanted to do since I was a young boy It wasn’t an overseas missionary calling, but it was clearly a missionary calling because it was to help the church embrace its essential missionary calling as the sent people of God.”



When WMI began at the Seminary in 1996, it was an informal, grassroots effort to raise up generations of pastors with a love for God’s mission. Now, two decades later, the Seminary is making WMI a strategic part of its curriculum.

“One of Don’s significant contributions to both organizations is that he has a vast and rich network of relationships to missionaries, mission co-workers and pastors,” says the Rev. Ralph Hawkins, chair of the World Mission Initiative Advisory Board and executive presbyter in the Shenango Presbytery. “Don has done a masterful job of making and keeping relationships in the global Christian community. He has a singular vision and is laser-focused on connecting us to God’s mission in the world, in its various forms. A lot of this work is behind the scenes. It’s a marathon rather than a sprint, but we can see the fruit.”

The Rev. Jennifer Haddox ’06 previously served alongside Don as associate director of WMI for the past decade. “Don taught me so much about servant leadership, the power of prayer and collaborating broadly for the sake of God’s mission,” Jen says. “He leads by serving, supporting and encouraging others.”

Scott Sunquist, the first McClure Professor of Mission and Evangelism at Pittsburgh Seminary, was one of the significant voices who convinced Don that God was calling him to the WMI director’s role. “Don is impressive in his rock-solid leadership and focus. His heart beats for God’s great love for the world.”

As children, the four Dawson siblings attended Sunday evening worship at the New Wilmington Mission Conference along with their parents. Don remembers he had a strong desire to be a missionary as a child of 8 or 10 and credits his parents for planting the missionary calling in his life growing up. Although they were farmers vocationally, they were followers of Jesus, which means “missionaries” to him. “God only sends a small number of missionaries overseas,” Don says, “Most missionaries God uses where they live and work, among their family and friends.”

After graduating from college and seminary, Don served as pastor of Hampton Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh Presbytery from 1982-2000 and Buffalo United Presbyterian Church in Sarver, Pa., from 1976-1982. This year marks the 40th anniversary of his ordination as a pastor.



Don’s brother Dave says, “A lot of blessed things have happened over the years that Don has been a part of. Not always things intended or planned, but things that happened by God’s grace. Don is excited about the future of WMI and NWMC under new leadership, and he’s also excited about where God will lead him in retirement.”

*This article originally appeared on **Presbyterian News Service**.*

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