

*Minute of Remembrance for Robert Gordon Wilkerson, Sr.*

June 6, 1937 – June 7, 2022

Although Robert and his wife, Jane Bates Wilkerson, were fairly new to Quakerism and to Birmingham Friends Meeting, Robert Wilkerson was in many ways a good elder to us all.

One Friend recalled that he “was the kindest man I have ever met,” and I think we all felt that. Robert was naturally interested in people, and his default position was kindness, concern and good wishes for those he knew. This made him an engaged friend and a thoughtful conversationalist. Robert’s kindness and concern for others extended to our youngest attenders. He taught First Day School and engaged our young Friends in conversation often. It was delightful to see his bright smile and enjoy his cordial greetings to all on First Days.

Robert was a devoted Christian and a former pastor in several protestant denominations. In a Meeting with a diversity of religious beliefs, he did the most amazing thing: he never proselytized. He spoke his own truth faithfully, but he never corrected or argued theology. In fact, he often criticized Christians who observed the letter but not the spirit of scripture. He declared himself a “red letter Christian” who followed Jesus’ teachings of love, acceptance and mercy. His history of having lost a pastorate for trying to integrate the church spoke volumes to us. Here was someone who had bravely lived his principles under duress. How Quakerly, and how compelling. A Friend recalled a time during which she felt it difficult to believe in anything, but Robert’s faithful example showed her that she could believe in Jesus.

Robert kept us up to date on Alabama legislation that affected those most marginalized. By example, he reminded us of the importance of trying to live up to our Testimonies. He had an abiding concern for social justice in an unjust state, and he expressed his concern for others in frequent editorials in local and regional news outlets, supporting measures that would improve life for those who find it hardest. We benefitted from his understanding and concern. One friend called him our “conscience.” He reminded us to continue advocating for reform in Alabama and encouraged us to intensify our efforts. Always, his example reminded us to love our neighbors and one another.

Approved by the Ministry and Nurture Committee  
Birmingham Friends Meeting  
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