

2010 Hawkinson Honorary Award

Rev. Verlyn Smith

“Verlyn Smith has been an active peacemaker and equality affirmer for decades. During his years as a professor and director of campus ministries, he was courageous in working with students and faculty concerning war and the importance of supporting full civil and human rights for gays and lesbians. While a pastor at Grace University Lutheran he reaffirmed this witness and has continued it into his retirement. He has been there from the beginning of both People of Faith Peacemakers and the Vincent L. Hawkinson Foundation and been active in support of the work of the joint Peace with Justice Task Force of the Minneapolis and St. Paul Area Synods.”

Lowell O. Erdahl

A lifelong peace and justice activist, **Verlyn Smith** of St. Paul grew up on a farm in South Dakota. As World War II was ending, he served as a chaplain's assistant in the US Army Air Corps. After discharge, he attended Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD, and graduated from Luther Seminary in St. Paul in 1954. He then earned a master's degree in church history from the University of Chicago.



After serving two parishes, he joined the faculty of Augustana College, where he taught religion and church history from 1955 to 1968. In 1969, he was appointed a regional director of the Lutheran Campus Ministry, serving campus ministries in 10 western states. During this time, he became deeply connected to the political upheaval and trouble on-campus around issues related to the war in Vietnam and the civil rights movement. Among the many challenges he faced were the need to counsel and work with conscientious objectors amid criticism from church officials objecting to anti-war activism.

In 1977, he moved to the Twin Cities and served as Twin Cities metropolitan campus pastor. He was a co-founder of People of Faith Peacemakers, a resource and support group for those with concerns for peace and justice from a faith perspective. “It was through this group that we learned to know and value Verlyn’s importance as a supporter of radical justice for all, and his broad view of the church to teach and work for peace and justice,” said Eleanor and John Yackel of Circle Pines, MN. From 1985 to 1992, he served as pastor at Grace University Lutheran Church located on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. He was a founder of the Vincent L. Hawkinson Foundation for Peace & Justice, established in 1988 in recognition of Grace University Lutheran’s previous pastor, Vincent L. Hawkinson.

After moving to the Twin Cities, Smith helped lead suicide support groups after his first wife had died by suicide. Later he taught college courses in religion and adult education classes. He has served on the ELCA’s Peace and Justice Committee and other peace organizations such as the Nonviolent Peace Force and Citizens for Global Solutions.



“Early in my role as a ministry associate with Wingspan Ministry, Verlyn served as a member of the community board of advisors for this new ministry with and on behalf of GLBT people, their families and friends. He’s been a long-time mentor, friend and a person of encouragement through the years of struggle towards a more inclusive ELCA.”

Rev. Anita C. Hill