

“He Knew Where He Was Going”
A Tribute on Behalf of Dr. Mike White
Presented at the Funeral Service
By: Stan Reid
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My name is Stan Reid. I’m president of Austin Graduate School of Theology. I’ve been asked to speak briefly on behalf of the family at Austin Graduate School of Theology. This is an honor because Mike endeared himself to all of us at Austin Grad.

Mike became a member of our Board of Trustees in 1995 serving as the Chairman from 2001-2004. During his tenure as Chair, Mike saw the School through a critical period of transition. This included the School’s reaffirmation of accreditation in 2001, the creation of its graduate degree program, and guiding the search for a new president.

Before I speak specifically about Mike’s influence at Austin Graduate School of Theology, I will make a few general observations about how he gracefully integrated his life as a scientist and his life of faith. This became an invaluable asset for our School.

I found it remarkable that Mike was as comfortable in the classroom with hundreds of freshmen, some of whom were struggling with the basic concepts of chemistry, as he was in the lab guiding the research of the brightest Ph.D. candidates. In conversations with Mike, it was clear that he genuinely cared for all of his students. This reached beyond the UT campus to Austin Grad as well.

Yesterday, I went to several websites to learn more about Mike’s work. Reading the list of his accomplishments and honors was impressive. However, I never once heard Mike or Gwen mention any of these accolades.

That is not surprising since Mike was a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Mike’s humility was a part of his core character. That core character was formed under the training of Jesus.

About Jesus, one New Testament scholar wrote, “He had no desire to spread about what he had done, who he was, or his views on miscellaneous topics. He was not concerned that people cater to him and respond to his every whim. Rather, he came as Son of God to exhibit the very characteristics of God—that he is a loving God, a God of great compassion and mercy.... his life was not self-seeking, but dedicated to caring for and helping others. He desired no acclaim. He wished only to serve.”

Mike bore a striking resemblance to that description of Jesus. Relationships with his peers as a scientist and his students as a teacher were shaped under the tutelage of Jesus.

Mike’s effort to integrate his Christian faith with his work as a scientist led him to appreciate theological inquiry. A classic definition of theology is “faith seeking understanding.” That definition well describes Mike’s endeavor to integrate his work and

his faith. Mike never imposed his religious beliefs on his students in the classroom. However, he was always willing to engage students in conversation about the relationship between science and faith. At the end of the semester, Mike invited interested students to join him in such a discussion. He would borrow a room at our School adjacent to the UT campus and provide the pizza.

Mike was also a faithful churchman. His care for the church included an appreciation for Schools like Austin Graduate School of Theology where ministers and other Christian servants are trained to better know, understand, practice, and pass on the faith.

As a member of our Board of Trustees, Mike blessed us with his academic expertise and administrative wisdom. We were likewise touched by his common sense and blessed by his delightful sense of humor. I will close with two anecdotes and a story about another world renowned scientist.

First, I will always remember Mike's great sense of humor. His infectious smile was endearing. The mischievous grin always had a disarming quality. Last December, my wife and I were blessed to be at the table with Mike and Gwen at Austin Grad's annual Christmas party. Students traditionally present a skit in which they mimic and exaggerate some of their professors' mannerisms and eccentricities. Mike, knowing the professors well, laughed until he cried. However, with Mike, we always knew that he was laughing with us, and not at us.

Second, about this time last year, we had our annual back to school party. Mike and Gwen had just returned from Washington and Mike was having trouble readjusting to the Texas heat. Gwen came into our kitchen laughing about how Mike had been complaining all day about the awful heat. During the party, we noted how Mike enjoyed meeting the students and learning about their backgrounds and their interests. He left saying, "Being with these students was worth getting out in the Texas heat again."

I conclude with a story Mike would appreciate. It's about another famous scientist, Albert Einstein. Professor Einstein was traveling by train to an appointment. When the conductor asked for his ticket, Einstein could not find it. The conductor recognized the famous professor and said, "I know you are Dr. Einstein and trust that you purchased your ticket. Don't worry about it." Later the conductor saw Einstein on his hands and knees looking under the seat for his misplaced ticket. The conductor again told the professor, "You are Dr. Einstein, I trust that you bought your ticket, please don't worry about it." In frustration, Einstein replied, "Young man, you don't seem to understand. I too know who I am, but I don't remember where I'm going so I must find my ticket!"

Throughout his life, Mike White demonstrated that he not only knew who he was as scientist and as a Christian, but he also knew where he was going. His direction was determined by being a disciple of Jesus. That formed his character in such a way that it flowed over into his professional life and determined all of his relationships. Austin Graduate School of Theology is a better place because Mike White contributed his caring touch. For that, we are eternally thankful.

