

DR. ROY ABRAM BURKHART

Born: August 28, 1895

Died: December 9, 1962

Roy Abram Burkhardt, a resident of Upper Arlington from 1950 to 1962, was born into a Mennonite family in Newville, Pennsylvania. In 1917 he graduated from Shippensburg Teachers State Normal School, then served in France during World War I. Shortly after enlisting in the army, he married Hazel Shover on August 24, 1917. Following his return from overseas, he held posts in Pennsylvania high schools as principal, then superintendent.

Moving into the religious field, he became National Director of Young People's Work for the United Brethren and Evangelical Churches, Dayton, Ohio, in 1923, and earned his A.B. degree from Otterbein College in 1927. For the next eight years he lived in Chicago while serving as Associate Director for the International Council of Religious Education. He was Director of Camps and Summer Schools, and one of organizers and the first secretary of the United Christian Youth Movement in North America. In 1929 he was ordained to ministry by the Congregational Christian Church, forerunner of the present United Church of Christ. During this period he also attended the University of Chicago, earning his M.A. in religious education; and focusing on sociology, psychology and religion for his Ph.D. which was awarded in 1936. For his doctoral dissertation he made a study of the social adjustment problems of senior high school students.

Dr. Burkhart came to First Community Church in 1935 where he served as Senior Minister until his retirement in 1958, continuing his ministry in emeritus status until his death. Under his leadership, the church grew in the scope of its ministry as well as in membership. Burkie, as he was known to everyone, developed an innovative philosophy known as the "full guidance ministry". He believed that only the church can minister to the total family across all seasons of life, and only the church can build a vital teamwork among all agencies in the community. His church became noted for the many programs it offered including counseling, daily pre-school, prayer and study groups, Couples Circles, pre-marital and pre-natal classes, Alcoholics Anonymous, vigorous youth groups, camping activities, and Cambridge Club, the country's first singles' group. An article in the February 5, 1949, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* reported that 96% of high school students in the Tri-Village area were involved in the church's programs. Clergy from across the U.S. and Canada came to attend the ministers' seminars conducted by the church staff. In 1950 First Community Church was chosen as one of the twelve leading churches in America by a poll of 100,000 ministers conducted by *The Christian Century*.

Burkie's influence went far beyond the walls of First Community Church. Schools, police, courts, and social agencies worked with him, and all juvenile cases in the Tri-Village area were automatically paroled to him by the Franklin County Juvenile Court. He organized a church-labor forum and church-management council to mitigate labor-management frictions, and his parishioners worked with the Court of Domestic Relations in guiding unmarried mothers, persons from broken homes, and cases of juvenile delinquency.

Through his nationally recognized program of pastoral counseling, he worked not only with industrial organizations and professional groups at basic problems of human relations and motivation, but also on such personal problems as vocational guidance, employment maladjustments and parent-child difficulties. He organized and raised the budget for Near North Side Neighborhood Council, helped create Central Community House, and instigated the Village Little Theatre. Camp Akita in Hocking County, originally a gift to Dr. Burkhart, who in turn gave it to the church, continues to play a major role in the church's ministry to the wider community.

His interest in interdenominational and non-denominational church work led him to organize the Franklin County Council of Churches. He helped to form the Ohio Association for Community Centered Churches, and the International Council of Community Churches which he served as the first president. In 1952 he was one of the founders and first president of World Neighbors, Inc., an organization dedicated to helping people in underdeveloped nations on the village level. He also organized World Compassion, Inc. in 1958, a movement for compassion among Christians throughout the world.

During his career, Dr. Burkhart wrote sixteen books, and numerous pamphlets and articles. He frequently lectured at seminaries, colleges and religious gatherings throughout the nation; and for eight years conducted an inspirational radio broadcast, *The Lighted Window*.

Dr. Burkhart was a member of Rotary Club and a 33rd Degree Mason, and also an honorary member of Northwest

Kiwanis Club: Both McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and Otterbein College awarded him honorary D.D. degrees. He was elected an alumni trustee of Otterbein and in 1972 was enshrined in Otterbein's Hall of Fame.

His most visible contribution to Upper Arlington is First Community Village which opened in 1963, the realization of his vision of a retirement community that would be not just a place to live, but a way of life. In 1994 its Hillside House was renamed the Roy A. Burkhart Center in his honor.

Dr. and Mrs. Burkhart lived first at 2455 Canterbury Road and later at 1515 Zollinger Road. They had two children Jeanne, Mrs. Paul Selby of Morgantown, West Virginia and the late Dr. William, whose widow Catharine, now Mrs. Charles Nichols, lives in Marble Cliff. Their seven grandchildren, Stephen, Mark and Daniel Selby and Ellen, Karolyn, Nancy and Dr. David Burkhart, are scattered across the country.

Perhaps Burkie's greatest legacy lies in the countless lives he touched. He was an educator, minister, counselor, mentor and friend. His influence lives on in the hearts of those to whom he gave his inspiration, guidance and hope.