

Memorial Minute for Max Heirich
(May 13, 1931 – April 27, 2017)

Testimony to the Grace of God
in the Life of Max Arthur Heirich

Max Arthur Heirich, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Michigan, died on April 27, 2017, at the age of 85 after a long illness. He was known to many in the Ann Arbor community for his teaching, spiritually informed social activism, and work in alternative medicine. His academic work encompassed the sociology of religion, social movements, and healthcare.

A member of the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting since 1968, Max will be remembered as a spiritual seeker by those who knew him and by the many whom he helped. Born the son of Charles and Virginia Heirich in Aurora, Illinois, on May 13, 1931, Max grew up in Muskogee, Oklahoma. His early life was strongly influenced by deep study of the Bible. He trained as a youth minister and after high school entered the College of Emporia (Kansas) with the intention of becoming a minister. He then transferred to Earlham College, graduating in 1953. During the Korean War, Max became the first conscientious objector in the history of Muskogee and served his Alternative Service by teaching at Warren Wilson College, North Carolina.

As a staff member of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) for six years, Max visited college campuses raising questions about war, peace, and race relations. In this role, he was present at the founding of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960, and worked with many activists in the civil rights movement. These experiences contributed to his life-long passion in defense of social justice and a deep personal identification with the African-American community.

In 1960 Max entered graduate school (in sociology) at UC Berkeley. At that time the Free Speech Movement erupted and became the topic of his dissertation. His book *The Spiral of Conflict: Berkeley 1964* remains the most authoritative account of that movement. In 1967 he joined the University of Michigan Sociology Department and became active in the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting with his wife, Jane, and four children. He served on the Meeting's Peace, Ministry and Counsel, Quaker House, and Gay and Lesbian Concerns committees, and as assistant clerk for seven years. He retired from the UM in 1999, a respected and popular teacher in both the Residential College and the Sociology Department.

In 1971, as part of his recovery from a debilitating illness, Max began to practice Hatha Yoga, which he continued to the end of his life, and encountered Polarity Therapy. A year's sabbatical apprenticing to non-Western healers led to refocusing his academic life to bring Western and non-Western understandings of reality into a more dynamic interchange. He co-founded the interdisciplinary UM Health Policy Forum; taught "Understandings of Health and Disease in the Classical Medical Systems of India and Tibet" at the UM Medical School and an undergraduate course on Western and non-Western medicine; and developed programs for health promotion in the workplace for the Worker Health Program (UM Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations). He served as consultant to the National Institute of Health's Complementary and Alternative Medicine Advisory Board and to the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy. He also co-authored Congressional testimony presented by the AFSC in support of the Affordable Care Act, and in the late 1980s conducted retreats to address the spiritual needs of people with AIDS.

In retirement Max continued to focus on making the world a better place: listening at a deep level, exploring better living alternatives and health-care for the elderly, and working to slow climate change. He promoted renewable energy and shared his concern for the Earth both through Quaker channels and as a board member of Michigan Interfaith Power & Light. From 2010 until 2014 he represented Lake Erie

Yearly Meeting on the General Board of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, travelling to Washington, DC, each year to lobby for peace and social justice. He was also committed to Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (WICIR), often accompanying folks to their immigration appointments or court hearings in Detroit.

Max will be remembered for his unfailing ability to make close friends everywhere he went, his passion for music, and his love of terrible puns. Friends gravitated to him, seeking – and receiving – comfort, solace, and wisdom. When someone was in need, even a total stranger, Max did not hesitate to lend his car, provide a temporary bed on his couch, or take phone calls in the middle of the night. He lived from the heart, seeking and expressing his clear sense of divine guidance.

He is survived by his children, Douglas (Dana) of Palo Alto, California; Alan (Michele) of Half Moon Bay, California; Julia Heirich (Uwe Eichelhardt) of St. Oyens, Switzerland; and Deborah Maddox (Colby) of Chicago, Illinois; and by nine grandchildren, his former wife, Jane, his cat, Zima, and many dear friends. A memorial service was held to celebrate Max's life on May 27 in the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Ann Arbor under the care of Ann Arbor Friends.

Charitable gifts in Max's memory may be sent to AFSC, SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center), ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), or Michigan Interfaith Power & Light.