

Colorado couple receives Foundation philanthropy honor

INDIANAPOLIS, IN – The Rev. Bill and Benny Robertson of Colorado Springs, CO, have been presented the Harry T. Ice Distinguished Service Award for their philanthropy and service to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The couple was honored April 27 by the Christian Church Foundation Board of Directors, who use the Ice Award to recognize individuals who have demonstrated personal generosity, leadership in philanthropy and love of and commitment to the whole church. The award is in memory of the late Harry T. Ice, an Indianapolis attorney who served on the Blue Ribbon Committee that led to the Foundation's creation.

“If you want to give, it is not a sacrifice,” said Robertson, admitting he was embarrassed by the celebration dinner that was part of the Board of Directors' meeting. “If you take seriously the business of fund-raising and tell the story, people will respond to it.”

Robertson, who retired as a development officer from the Foundation in 1998, also had served in parish ministry for many years. He recalled hearing Hal Watkins, former president of what is now Church Extension, tell him “you don't have to be wealthy to be generous.”

The Robertsons were feted by two of Bill's former colleagues, James Johnson, Foundation president emeritus and current president at Lexington Theological Seminary; and Virginia Spradlin, the Foundation's retired chief financial officer. Both shared quips about the Robertsons, with Johnson calling them “wonderfully unique” and Spradlin praising the couple's “united generous spirit. A united spirit that has been synergized I believe, by the big-heartedness of a delightful couple.”

Benny Robertson offered thanks to both sets of their parents, who “were gracious and generous people, and they wanted us to be that way.”

“We loved the church and we loved our children, and so we decided our estate should be a third for the church and a third for each child. So when (son) John drowned, it was only natural for us to start giving his third to places where John had found love and places that we felt were worthy of his love,” she told the audience.

Johnson, in his remarks, said the definition of “philanthropist describes Bill and Benny Robertson to a tee.”

“It is a quality of life which has manifested itself in so many ways. Their historic love of the church is a gift to all of us. The Christian Church is stronger and healthier than it would have been without Bill and Benny. Their gifts of all kinds over many, many years have made institutions of the church and the church itself stronger; lives have indeed been changed.”