



## Mr. William Wendell Duff

September 25, 1928 - January 19, 2013

William W. (Bill) Duff, 84, who was a chemical engineer and local church leader and activist, died January 19 at St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson. He died of complications related to Parkinson's Disease.

Bill Duff was born in Newcastle, PA and grew up in India, where his parents were Presbyterian Church missionaries. He returned to the United States in 1946 and attended Westminster College in New Wilmington, PA. After serving in the Army during the Korean War, he studied Chemical Engineering at Drexel Institute of Technology in Philadelphia, graduating first in his class.

He worked as a chemical engineer for Sun Oil Company in Marcus Hook, PA and then for the Continental Oil Company in Baltimore, MD, where he became plant superintendent. He then worked for the Mitre Corporation in McLean, VA, where he worked as a technical consultant on the Army's program to decommission chemical weapons.

Bill Duff was active in civil rights and integration issues in the 1960s and 1970s, initially in the Chester, PA area, even serving as Vice President of the Chester Chapter of the NAACP, unusual for someone who was not black. After his activities were mentioned in the newspapers, he was pressured to resign from his engineering position. He did so and moved to Baltimore.

He continued an active role in Baltimore, purposely choosing to live in an integrated part of Baltimore city, sending his children to city public schools, and actively promoting integration at his workplace. For example, in the early 1970s he taught engineering classes at Howard University in order to be in a position to hire and promote African American students into key engineering positions. He was subsequently sent to rural Mississippi for a one-year project to turn around a money-losing plastics factory and integrate the staff. Back in Baltimore, he later helped start and managed one of the first emergency homeless shelters in Baltimore County.

After he retired from chemical engineering, he taught chemistry at the School for the Arts in Baltimore City for five years. He also studied Hebrew and Greek at the Ecumenical Institute at St. Mary's Seminary and wrote a biblical commentary titled *Genesis: A New Look at an Ancient Book*, published in 2006. He was very active at Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, serving in many roles. He also served on the regional church committee to evaluate Ministerial candidates, where he pushed for higher standards, including taking the candidates' test as a layman (and getting a perfect score) to prove that the exam was too lax.

He was the loving husband of Sarah C. Duff; devoted father of Robert Anderson Duff of Melrose, MA, Carolyn Elizabeth Gibbs of Pittsburgh, PA, and James William Duff of University Park, MD; brother of Kenneth M. Duff and his wife Doris of St. John, New Brunswick, Canada; brother-in-law of Elizabeth M. Zimmerman; and grandfather of William A. Duff, Emily R. Gibbs, Benjamin J. Gibbs, Julia R. Gibbs, Joel A. Duff, Sarah E. Duff, and Leah C. Duff.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Brown Memorial Woodbrook Presbyterian Church, 6200 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21212 or The Parkinson's Disease Research-Udall Center at Johns Hopkins, c/o Dr. Ted Dawson, 100 N Charles Street, Suite 346, Baltimore, MD 21201, or the

Presbyterian Church, USA, E862370 ,Education Mission: Pakistan. Please mail to: PCUSA, Remittance Processing, P.O. Box 643700, Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700.

# Cemetery Details

## Brown Memorial Woodbrook Presbyterian Church Columbarium

6200 N. Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21212

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

FEB **16**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church - Woodbrook  
6200 N. Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21212

# Tribute Wall

DC

“ From reading his obituary, I can see that William Duff was a very caring man who gave much for the benefit of others. What an inspiration!

*Dottie Colding*

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**Dottie Colding** - January 25, 2013 at 10:45 PM

MD

“ Meredith Smith Davidson lit a candle in memory of Mr. William Wendell Duff



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**Meredith Smith Davidson** - January 25, 2013 at 08:27 AM

MD

“ I have the fondest memories of spending time with Bill and the rest of the Duff family as a child. I recall many camping trips and visits to Baltimore. Bill and my Dad (Dr.Kenneth Lee Smith)were great friends who both fought for civil rights. I bet they are having an intense conversation in heaven about the current world events. Bill was a wonderful caring man who will be greatly missed by many.  
~~~Meredith Smith Davidson

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**Meredith Smith Davidson** - January 25, 2013 at 08:24 AM

LB

“ *Mr. Duff's legacy humbles me and at the same time it reignites my grass-roots activism to ensure that all of God's people are afforded the same rights and privileges. So many have been because of his work and many will continue to be blessed by his presence on earth. Thank you!*

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**Linda M. Bock** - January 24, 2013 at 10:09 AM