

**Mt. Elon Member on 40 Years of Assisted Living Ministry**

Buck Williams is not a reverend, nor does he pastor a church. He is not a music minister, but he does lead a time of singing for the same 15-20 people who gather for a weekly worship time. He doesn’t call it preaching, but Williams reads Scripture and shares a brief devotional thought every Sunday morning at Sedgewood Manor Healthcare Center in Hopkins.

“Some call me ‘Pastor Buck,’ but I tell them I’m not a pastor,” Williams says of his role in a weekly assisted living ministry. “A worker once told me I’m ‘the only pastor they have.’ When the residents see me, they know I’m coming to tell them about Jesus.”

Williams has been telling residents of Sedgewood Manor about Jesus almost every Sunday for 40 years. His ministry started at the invitation of a former pastor of Mt. Elon Baptist, where Williams has been a member since 1979. At that time, the pastor and a few members of the church choir would meet with residents before the Sunday worship hour. When others stopped participating, Williams continued by himself because it had become his calling and passion.

“I started doing this during the Sunday School hour as my class experience, instead of being there for 10 minutes before my own Sunday School was held at the church,” he explains.

Over the years, Williams has rarely missed a Sunday at Sedgewood Manor, or Stanton Pines, as it was originally named. When he was deployed for seven months during Desert Storm in 1991, a couple volunteered to continue the ministry in his absence. The only other major interference to his ministry has been Covid, which created a few facility-wide closures.

The schedule is the same every Sunday, by design. Williams explains that singing the same four hymns each week encourages participation, and “certain residents that would otherwise not speak, will sing because they know the words.” Some residents are already waiting in the room when Williams arrives around 10 a.m., then they sing two hymns acapella before a 10-minute devotion and Scripture reading. After a prayer, Williams closes with two more hymns.

“Attendants will watch and sometimes bring others over too because they are amazed when certain residents participate. Times like that make your heart feel so good,” Williams says.

After the program, Williams usually gets to Mt. Elon about 20 minutes ahead of the 11 a.m. worship service in time to participate in a pre-service prayer. He insists the commitment to a regular ministry isn’t hard – “if the Lord is sending you to do something like this, it’s a joy. It’s not a burden.”

Williams is also quick to express the love he has for the estimated 150 residents he has encountered over the years and who have included family, friends, and members of his church family. He recalls being surprised to discover that an aunt had moved into Sedgewood Manor and the moment he recognized his former high school guidance counselor who was living there. Williams enjoys building relationships with the residents and talks freely about faith during his visits.

Mr. Mintz was one of these residents who had a son who was a member at Mt. Elon. Williams knew Mr. Mintz was lost but didn’t get discouraged when he refused to attend the Sunday morning worship time or allow Williams to pray with him during visits. Mr. Mintz had been a racecar driver in his younger years, like Williams, so the two soon bonded over shared stories and acquaintances.

“My father never went to church during my life growing up, or wanted anything to do with Christianity,” says Gerald Mintz. “When he became a resident at Sedgewood, Buck would visit on Sundays and kept me updated on their conversations over those next five years.”

Mr. Mintz “didn’t want to talk about the Lord, led a life apart from God, and yet wasn’t worried about the future,” but Williams kept building their relationship and consistently offered to pray with him. One day Mr. Mintz allowed Williams to pray for his upcoming medical procedure, and also during the next few visits they had together. Williams reports Mr. Mintz “eventually allowed Mt. Elon Pastor Charles Wilson to meet with him and he accepted Jesus. That is one person that I know found the Lord through our ministry.”

“Buck told me my father started participating in the Sunday morning worship, and that was a big deal. It gave me peace of mind knowing that Daddy was going to heaven for sure,” Gerald Mintz shares.

The impact of another resident, Mrs. Juanita, “means everything” to Williams and is someone he thinks about often. Williams first met Mrs. Juanita when he was a boy, living in an apartment complex with his single mother who worked hard to make ends meet. If a rent check was late, Williams offered to sweep the apartment complex’s floors or help Mrs. Juanita in the front office to contribute. Mrs. Juanita was a member at Mt. Elon and would lead summertime Vacation Bible Schools at the apartment complex, and teach Sunday School lessons to the children living there. Twenty years later, the two reconnected when Williams joined Mt. Elon and then, in her later years, Mrs. Juanita moved into Sedgewood Manor.

“I was a candidate for tragedy, but she took time for me and ministered to me when I was a seven-year-old, then we worshipped together for 20-plus years at Mt. Elon. Then I ministered to her for about two years when she was a resident at the nursing home,” Williams says of their lifelong relationship.

Tammy Adamson is the Sedgewood Manor activities director, and sees the effects of Williams’ consistent ministry in the lives of residents who are “ready for him on Sunday mornings - one of the assisted living residents makes the effort to walk across the facility to be there! Buck knows our residents personally and will visit them at other times as well. He is a man of God, and is just wonderful.”

For his part, Williams says “the blessing is mine. We should have a burden to make sure every person has the opportunity to hear God’s word every Sunday morning. That’s part of the Great Commission - to spread the Word across the world and here, too. Those people in that nursing home are just as far away as people in Africa if no one goes to visit them. Every church has someone who could get involved in reaching out like this. It’s such a simple thing that’s easy to do.”