

Stories of Northside: The Martha Forrest Scholarship Endowment

INTERVIEWEES: **BOB & MARTHA FORREST**



If you've ever received a scholarship toward college tuition, you know how much of an impact it can make. For most, it's a financial lifeline—the difference between rejoicing on freshman move-in day and giving up hope entirely. Scholarships embody hope for a student, but each one also represents a desire of those who start them to give back and instill the same hope they received.

Enter member and retired North Georgia Conference district superintendent and United Methodist pastor, Reverend Martha Forrest. Martha—she doesn't like Reverend Forrest—was a Georgia Harkness Scholarship recipient who now fundraises and champions the Martha Forrest Scholarship Endowment, a Dollars for Scholars program for United Methodist students attending UM higher education institutions located in the state of Georgia.

This is the story of how it all began. What started as a creative birthday celebration idea by her husband, Bob, is now an integral part of more than 90 students' success stories.

Bob: Martha's 75th birthday was coming up, and I was trying to think of a unique way to celebrate it. We also wanted to find a way to do some scholarship stuff, so we held a combination birthday party and endowment fundraising drive here at Northside, called Party with a Purpose, as a way to give back and honor her ministry.

We started the scholarship through the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation and were connected with Dollars for Scholars, which means that any scholarship funds raised are matched three times. So \$1,000 turns into \$4,000. Fund matching not only encourages people to start scholarships, but it also encourages students to apply for them, because \$4,000 goes a long way. Since starting the scholarship in 2013, 94 students have received matching scholarships through the United Methodist Dollars for Scholars program.

Martha: Starting a scholarship really appealed to me. When I was in seminary, I received a wonderful

scholarship called the Georgia Harkness Scholarship for women in their second career. I didn't go to seminary until I was 37 because I needed to get all my kids in school. For the essay portion of the scholarship application, I had to list my first career. I said "motherhood," thinking they'd laugh me out of town. Instead, they accepted me. I got the scholarship and was very proud, because nothing is harder than being a mother. Georgia Harkness was one of the very first woman preachers from Tennessee, and the scholarship was in her honor. I was very proud to get that and now want to give other students the same chance at success.

I went to seminary, but I didn't go to become a pastor. Initially I just wanted to be a better Sunday school teacher. I played tennis and didn't want to give it up. My advisor wanted me to take a full load. He said I had potential. I said, "No. I just want to take Old Testament and New Testament, go home, and play tennis." He convinced me to try it for one semester. I loved it, felt at home, and realized this is what I was called to do. I've been a pastor now for about 50 years and have

loved serving in churches. You get to see things happen that you don't expect to happen.

Bob:

The beauty of it all is that this scholarship is a way for us to repay the support we've received over the years. It helps churches because we're helping students in churches. It helps the students because they receive financial aid. It also helps the schools, so it's sort of a win-win-win.

A couple of years ago we met one of the students who received a scholarship at Clark Atlanta University. She was homeless, living in her car, and was brought up in foster homes. She received the scholarship and was an outstanding student.

Martha:

She graduated and is now doing social work. She said she wanted to help kids like her that were in foster care. She was very impressive. I like to have a connection. We hear from a good majority of the awardees, and we get thank-you notes.

There's a girl at Wofford United Methodist College in South Carolina that we hear from every year. It's really neat. You want to keep up with them too, know what they do with their lives, and hear that success story. I actually knew her as a little girl because I was her pastor. That's fun too. You realize you have a lot of connections.

Bob:

I'm now a trustee at the UMHEF and sit on the scholarship committee.

One of the needs is to get more minorities involved in the scholarship program, so we came up with a new scholarship that we're trying to initiate now.

This new scholarship will be in addition to our current one. It's for minority students going to historically black colleges, specifically Clark Atlanta University and Gammon Theological Seminary, and it's \$5,000 a year, not \$1,000. Hopefully it'll send the message that we need to support more black and minority students seeking higher education, as well as historically black colleges and universities in our community.

To pull it off, we've got to raise \$125,000, and that's going to take a while. Once it's done, that \$5,000 will continue forever, which is why endowment is so wonderful. Plus, as long as they reapply each year, that \$5,000 could be awarded throughout undergraduate and graduate school, solidifying their chance at a bright future.

We've had a lot of support from a lot of people since 2013. I won't say it's been easy to raise money for scholarships, but people will give to a cause if they believe in it."

Martha:

Think of it this way. You spend the first half of your life getting stuff and then the second half unloading it. What you thought you had to have you didn't have to have. You need to pass it on and help somebody else out.

When we flip to Romans 12:12 and see "rejoice in hope," we're tempted to focus on our own possession of hope. We have hope, so we rejoice. Hearing the Forrests' story, however, gives light to a secondary meaning. Perhaps we are called to rejoice in another's hope as well, or, still further, make that hope possible and rejoice in the joy that fills our hearts because of it. Martha and Bob give hope to United Methodist students, and while the students certainly rejoice, they rejoice, knowing that with God's help "they get to see things happen that they didn't expect." ☪

HOW TO GIVE

Contribute online at www.UMHEF.org/give (choose Martha Forrest Endowment Fund from the drop-down)

Or

Mail a check made out to UMHEF to:

The United Methodist Higher Education Foundation
Attn: Martha Forrest HBCU Scholarship or Martha Forrest Scholarship Endowment
P.O. Box 340005, Nashville, TN 37203