

Meier, Willard (1918–2016)

ANDREW HOWE

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Willard Meier was a long-time faculty member at La Sierra University and the first dean of its School of Education.

Early Life and Denominational Service

Meier was born in Garfield, Washington, on August 31, 1918. He enjoyed school, taking part in drama at Farmington High School. He attended Walla Walla

College, earning a B.A. in history in 1940. During the war Meier served as the principal of Boise Junior Academy in 1941-1942 and of Seattle Junior Academy from 1942-1946.¹ During that time he was drafted, but the Washington Conference appealed his case on the grounds of difficulty in finding a replacement principal. His deferment request would become a test case for teachers in parochial schools, and ultimately Meier was allowed to stay in his current role at Seattle Junior Academy.²

Meier moved to Angwin, California, in 1946 and would spend the next decade in a variety of capacities at Pacific Union College: as an instructor at the PUC Preparatory School (1946-1948), as the principal of that school (1948-1954), and as an assistant professor of history and education at the college (1954-1956).³ During this time he was also busy continuing his education and starting a family. Meier earned a Master's degree in history from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1949, and he and his wife–Blanche Johnson–adopted a baby boy, Ronnie Dean, in 1955.⁴

The next stop for the family was Australia, as Meier took an extended leave from PUC in 1956 to join Avondale College as a liaison officer. Although he was representing the Pacific Union school, Meier made numerous contributions to Avondale during his two-year stay. In addition to teaching full time, he had numerous administrative duties, established a secondary teacher-education program, and helped the college achieve



Willard Meier.

Photo courtesy of Vicky Fry L. Source: *Find a Grave*,

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/182852701/willard-h-meier>

accreditation. In recognition of his many contributions to Avondale, its faculty and staff nicknamed Meier the “Great Elaborator,” a play on Abraham Lincoln’s well-known nickname.⁵

Seeking a doctorate, the next move took Meier to Silver Spring, Maryland, where in 1958--1959 he taught mathematics at Northwood High School and served as a lecturer in education at Potomac College while starting doctoral studies at the University of Maryland. A year later Meier transferred to the Ed.D. program at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he would serve as a TA and research assistant from 1960-1963, until receiving a call to join the faculty of La Sierra College’s Education department. He would complete his Ed.D. at UCLA, with a specialty in Curriculum and Instruction, in 1966.⁶

Contributions to La Sierra

Meier would spend the rest of his career at La Sierra, first as a faculty member who taught history, psychology, and education (1963-1968) and later as the first dean of La Sierra’s new School of Education (1968-1983);⁷ an entity upon which he labored for years to create alongside George True Simpson and others. La Sierra was the first Adventist institution of higher education to separate out education as its own school, a marker of true university status. The innovation did not stop there, however. As dean, Meier oversaw successful accreditation bids for graduate programs at the Master’s, Ed.S., and Ed.D. levels. He also opened up three credential programs and satellite campuses so those at a distance could earn credentials and degrees. He was instrumental in drawing up the curriculum for educational psychology and fought to increase stipends for Seventh-day Adventist student teachers to be commensurate with those of secular schools, making such teachers-in-training more likely to stay in the Adventist system.⁸ According to Lennard Jorgensen, former professor of School Psychology and vice-president of Student Life at La Sierra, Meier worked closely with Victor Christiansen in order to stay ahead of the curve with the rapidly changing world of education. One spent time working with state officials in Sacramento, the other with church officials in Silver Spring, the goal being that La Sierra was able to quickly adapt to new educational requirements and keep its curriculum up to date. Upon his retirement in 1983, Meier was awarded the status of Dean Emeritus.⁹

Interpersonally, Meier was known for being student-centered and for his ability to make everyone feel valued. He was praised for his diplomacy and gentle attitude.¹⁰ Meier was well known for citing the “Three Fs” to would-be teachers: be firm, be fair, be friendly. Meier lived this motto, supportive of students but also holding them to high standards.¹¹

Lifelong Service

Meier was also known for another motto: “There is much joy in service.” He contributed his time and expertise to a number of communities outside of La Sierra, serving for years on the Alvord School District Board, including a term as its president.¹² He was also a member of Western Association of Schools and Colleges, of a local

speaker's bureau, and was on the Dean's Council in the Graduation School of Education at UCLA. He served as a consultant for the University of California, Riverside, when that institution sought to establish Master's and doctoral programs in Education. He was a member of the Pacific Union Conference Education Board for 27 years and as well as the North American Division committees involving Adventist education. Due to Meier's lifetime of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to education, the General Conference honored him with an Award of Merit.¹³

Meier was not idle in his retirement. As one former colleague noted at a campus memorial event: "He walked fast, and he talked fast."¹⁴ He was not one to take it easy in his retirement and coordinated extended education programs in the Southern Union and at Canadian Union College. He also traveled quite a bit in his retirement, including several trips to the Holy Land, following in the footsteps of Jesus. Meier was preceded in death by his wife and son and passed away on January 8, 2016, at the age of 97.¹⁵

SOURCES

Guy, Fritz. "Remembrance for Dr. Willard Meier." Recording of memorial service made by Andrew Howe on April 19, 2016.

Jorgensen, Lennard. "Remembrance for Dr. Willard Meier." Recording of memorial service made by Andrew Howe on April 19, 2016.

"Obituary." *Pacific Union Recorder*. March 12, 2016.

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Simpson, Cheryl. "Remembrance for Dr. Willard Meier." Recording of memorial service made by Andrew Howe on April 19, 2016.

"Willard H. Meier: 1918-2016." (Riverside) *Press-Enterprise*. January 17, 2016. Recovered at: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/pe/obituary.aspx?n=willard-h-meier&pid=177328958>

NOTES

1. "Willard H. Meier: 1918-2016," *Press-Enterprise*, January 17, 2016. Recovered at: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/pe/obituary.aspx?n=willard-h-meier&pid=177328958>.
2. M. Hodgen, interview by the author, November 2, 2016.
3. Personnel File, La Sierra University.

4. "Willard H. Meier: 1918-2016."
5. M. Hodgen, interview by the author, November 2, 2016.
6. "Willard H. Meier: 1918-2016."
7. Personnel File.
8. F. Guy, "Remembrance for Dr. Willard Meier," recording of memorial made by Andrew Howe on April 19, 2016.
9. Personnel File.
10. C. Simpson, "Remembrance for Dr. Willard Meier," recording of memorial made by Andrew Howe on April 19, 2016.
11. F. Guy, "Remembrance."
12. "Willard H. Meier: 1918-2016."
13. F. Guy, "Remembrance."
14. Ibid.
15. "Obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, March 12, 2016.

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