

‘The Message’ Author Eugene Peterson Under Hospice Care

Eugene Peterson, the bestselling author of “The Message” and longtime pastor praised as a “shepherd’s shepherd,” is moving into hospice and receiving palliative medical care.

Peterson, 85, was hospitalized Tuesday (Oct. 9) “when he took a sudden and dramatic turn in his health caused by an infection,” according to an email from his son Eric Peterson. The elder Peterson already had been dealing with dementia and congestive heart failure, both of which are progressing, according to his son’s email.

He is expected to receive hospice care at home.

His son’s email was shared over the weekend in a Facebook post by Robert Creech, professor of Christian ministries at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary.

“Eugene Peterson has encouraged, formed, and often literally saved the ministry of more than one pastor over the years through his writing and thinking (I would include myself in that list),” Creech wrote in the post.

“He has refreshed Scripture for many through his thoughtful paraphrase of the Bible published as The Message. He has taught us to pray.”

The Truett Seminary professor encouraged prayer for Peterson and his family as Eric Peterson announced the author and pastor was being moved into hospice care and likely had months to live.

After consulting with doctors, Eric Peterson wrote, he shared three things with his father: He is loved, he is in the last months of his life and his family will do everything they can

to make his remaining time comfortable and enjoyable. When he asked his father how he felt about entering his last months, Eric Peterson wrote, his father thought before responding, "I feel good about that."

He closed his email, dated Oct. 12: "I'm not exactly sure what he meant by it, but one of the last things he said to me this evening was, 'It just seems so sacred that they trust me so much.'

"Every moment in this man's presence is sacred."

Peterson pastored the church he founded, Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Md., for 30 years while also writing widely to encourage and develop other pastors. He retreated from public life last year after publishing his final book, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," but not before causing some controversy by telling Religion News Service columnist Jonathan Merritt he would perform a same-sex marriage, celebrated in the Presbyterian Church (USA), before retracting that statement.

He also told RNS in an interview last year that he did not fear death.

"I don't think it's anything to be afraid of," he said.

"I have no idea how it's going to work out. But I'm not afraid, I'll tell you that. I've been with a lot of people who are dying. I think those conversations are some of the best I've ever had. These are people who have lived a good life and who have embraced their faith. They're not afraid." {eo}

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