

Steve Hayner, seminary president and leader in campus ministry, dies at 66

by [Michael Thompson](#) with added sources in the [March 4, 2015](#) issue



Photo courtesy of [Columbia Theological Seminary](#)

Stephen A. Hayner, 66, president emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary and a national leader in campus ministry, died January 31 in Decatur, Georgia, less than a year after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

He went on medical leave as president this past summer while undergoing treatment.

Born June 23, 1948, Hayner held degrees from Whitman College, Harvard Divinity School, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

In 1973, Hayner was ordained and installed as university pastor at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, where he was involved with students and faculty. The campus ministry, which started with 17 students, quickly grew to over 1,200. During two sabbaticals, he completed his Ph.D. in Hebrew and Semitic studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 1984.

Hayner served as vice president of student affairs at Seattle Pacific University until 1988, when he became president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (USA), a

nondenominational ministry to students on college campuses across the country.

“Steve brought pastoral care, healing, and hope to an InterVarsity community that had undergone much trauma in the 1980s,” said Alec Hill, current InterVarsity president. “He is one of the kindest and most authentic people I’ve ever known.”

Hayner also was an adjunct professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Regent College, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In 2001, Hayner returned to parish ministry as a pastor at High Point Church and at the Fountain of Life Family Ministry Center, both in Madison, Wisconsin.

He moved to Columbia Theological Seminary in 2003 to become the Peachtree Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth, while also serving as scholar in residence at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. He was named president in 2009.

Deborah Flemister Mullen, dean of faculty and executive vice president of CTS, remembered their partnership as president and dean.

“Steve was not only my closest colleague on the administrative staff, he was a beloved brother in Christ and my friend,” she said. “The seminary is a very different place because of Steve Hayner’s gifts of life, especially his commitment to God’s wide welcome of everyone to the table.”

M. Craig Barnes, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, who had been friends with Hayner for nearly three decades, noted in a September article for the Christian Century that Hayner “signed his letters with the word joyfully before his name” and that he approached dying as he approached living: “In his latest e-mail he wrote, ‘Both grief and joy knock us about like outsized ocean waves. The waves take us by surprise but also remind us of what it means to be human—and pursued by grace.’”

*This article was edited on February 17, 2014.*