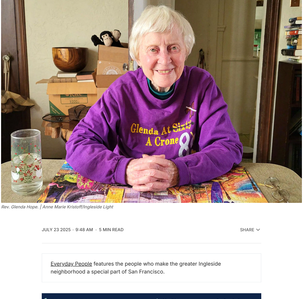
EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Q&A: Rev. Glenda Hope On Her Philosophy of Change

The 89-year-old community pillar was recently given a service and leadership award by the Community Living Campaign.

ANNE MARIE KRISTOFF



Rev. Glenda Hope. | Anne Marie Kristoff/Ingleside Light

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Rev. Glenda Hope has spent the last six decades serving the community and tackling social issues and she's not done yet.

The Cayuga Terrace resident, who's originally from Atlanta, has always been a boundary breaker like becoming the first woman in Georgia state to become a candidate for the Presbyterian church ministry despite resistance from male counterparts or participating in anti-war sit-ins and hosting vigils for the Black Lives Matter movement. She moved to San Francisco in 1967, meeting her husband, Scott Hope, who was a professor at San Francisco State University and finishing her ministry education. She was ordained in 1970 and retired in 2013 with decades of life-changing community service under her belt.

"When I graduated from college, I knew I was called to, as we put it at that time, to enter a church vocation," Hope said. "The Presbyterian church did not ordain women at that time."

Hope quickly became a pillar for thousands in San Francisco, especially in the Tenderloin. She created many groups and programs to tackle issues she was most passionate about, such as forming the San Francisco Network Ministries, which started as a house church in her living room, that provided affordable housing to families and the San Francisco SafeHouse for women involved in sex trafficking and prostitution.

She also taught a class on spiritual discipline of the minister for the Network Center for Christian Ministry and conducted hundreds of memorials, many for those in the Tenderloin. As she got older, she focused on services for elderly individuals like forming Cayuga Community Connectors with her neighbors to get more exercise and joining the Old Women's League to continue to tackle the world's social justice issues.

Hope will also be receiving the Community Living Campaign's Norma Satten Community Service and Leadership award in September for her decades of service. She also said there is a documentary being made about her and though she is humbled and mentioned there are other people who should be receiving the praise, Hope is wary.

She doesn't want others to diminish themselves due to her achievements and know they are "capable of great things." Hope highlights the need for teamwork, noting that she couldn't have achieved so much without the people around her.

"The world likes stars and celebrities, but saints are nobody unless there are others involved," Hope said. "I like to focus on the team. Anything I've ever done has involved a team of people and maybe they need somebody to get going, but ultimately it's the team that makes it happen."

The Ingleside Light talked with Hope to learn more about her service.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

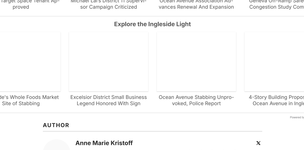
What does a typical day in retirement look like for you?

I don't have a typical day. I get up and feed my dog and have breakfast. On Monday and Wednesday, I go to an exercise class for women over 60. I started that. It's called Cayuga Community Connectors. I exercise twice a week and I'm involved with the Older Women's League. I'm on the board and so we might be planning something. We have monthly meetings, and weekly we send out what we call an OWL alert and this got started during Trump's first term because there was just so much stuff. We thought, how are we going to respond to this? Members of the board take turns for a month and we would identify an issue, usually a piece of legislation. It could be local, state, or federal and we would send out an email that said, This is the issue. This is what you can do about it. These are the people you should contact and the contact information, because we think everybody can do at least one thing a week.

Meanwhile, here, I've developed a kind of pastoral ministry and I visit people who are ill or who maybe have gotten really isolated or who are dying and that just calls on my experience as a pastor. It's just important for people to know that they haven't been forgotten, so I will go and visit people and I really enjoy it. I'm an extrovert and I'm a pastor. I love doing that. I might be doing that. I might be reading. I might be working on puzzles.

What is something about being a reverend that people may not know?

Surely there are no longer people who think we only work on Sunday. Pastors need friends just like anybody else does. What I learned in the Tenderloin was that it didn't matter to people that I'm a Christian minister. At certain times, they want somebody who they believe represents the Holy One and has that, what I call "the good housekeeping seal of approval." It could be a rabbi, could be a pastor, a minister, could be a pastor...I saw in the Tenderloin that they were perfectly fine with me just obviously being a Christian minister because I wore a clerical collar and a cross and if I were, for instance, say at a memorial service, I would usually say "We may come from different backgrounds. I'm a Christian minister. I'll be using readings and prayers from the Jewish and Christian traditional. Make whatever use of this is good for you." And that worked, but they wanted me to be authentic.



Hope keeps her sense of humor.

How do you stay motivated to keep fighting for justice?

Simple answer is I'm a Christian and I believe that God empowers us and calls us to resist overt and covert violence and to try to challenge that and to change it. I believe in God's inclusive love. She loves everybody, not only people but creatures on the whole earth. Overt violence is obvious. I mean, the ultimate example of that is war, but there's plenty of other overt violence around and covert violence is in the structures, in the laws and the regulations. There's, God knows, plenty of that happening right now, taking away food stamps, cutting down Medicaid and Medicare. That is covert violence and cruelty.

What's one piece of advice you have for someone who wants to pursue social justice?

I think everybody should be doing social justice activism, and what you need to do is to identify one or two things that you're really going to work on, maybe for the rest of your life. And you get involved and you become an expert and you stay with it. You stay with it long enough that you can really make a difference. Now, I'm involved with issues of aging, and I've learned so much about that and I go to the supervisors and testify and of course the Older Women's League and other things like that.

I would also say never work alone. Find people. You may start something alone, but find people who have the same concerns. You may have to put yourself out there, but try to never work alone. It's better if you can connect yourself with an existing organization. If your concern is climate change, which should be everyone's concern, there are so many groups working on that. Find the one that seems to fit your needs.

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