

Wenger, Arthur Daniel ^[1]

Wenger, Arthur Daniel

by Walter W. Anderson, Jr., 1996

15 Oct. 1916–25 Feb. 1977

Arthur Daniel Wenger, college president and clergyman, was born on a farm in Aberdeen, Idaho, the son of Frank L. and Anna Toevs Wenger, both members of the Mennonite church. His father came from a Swiss Mennonite family that had immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1717 and then to the Valley of Virginia, Missouri, Kansas, and, later, Idaho. His mother's ancestors were German Mennonites ^[2] who had wandered through Russia to Turkestan, Canada, and Kansas before settling in Idaho. Wenger attended Bethel College ^[3] in Newton, Kans., his father's alma mater, earning a A.B. degree in history in 1941. He attended the San Francisco Theological Seminary ^[4] in San Anselmo, Calif., in 1941–42, was ordained to the ministry of the Mennonite church in 1942, and became the minister of First Mennonite Church in Shafter, Calif.

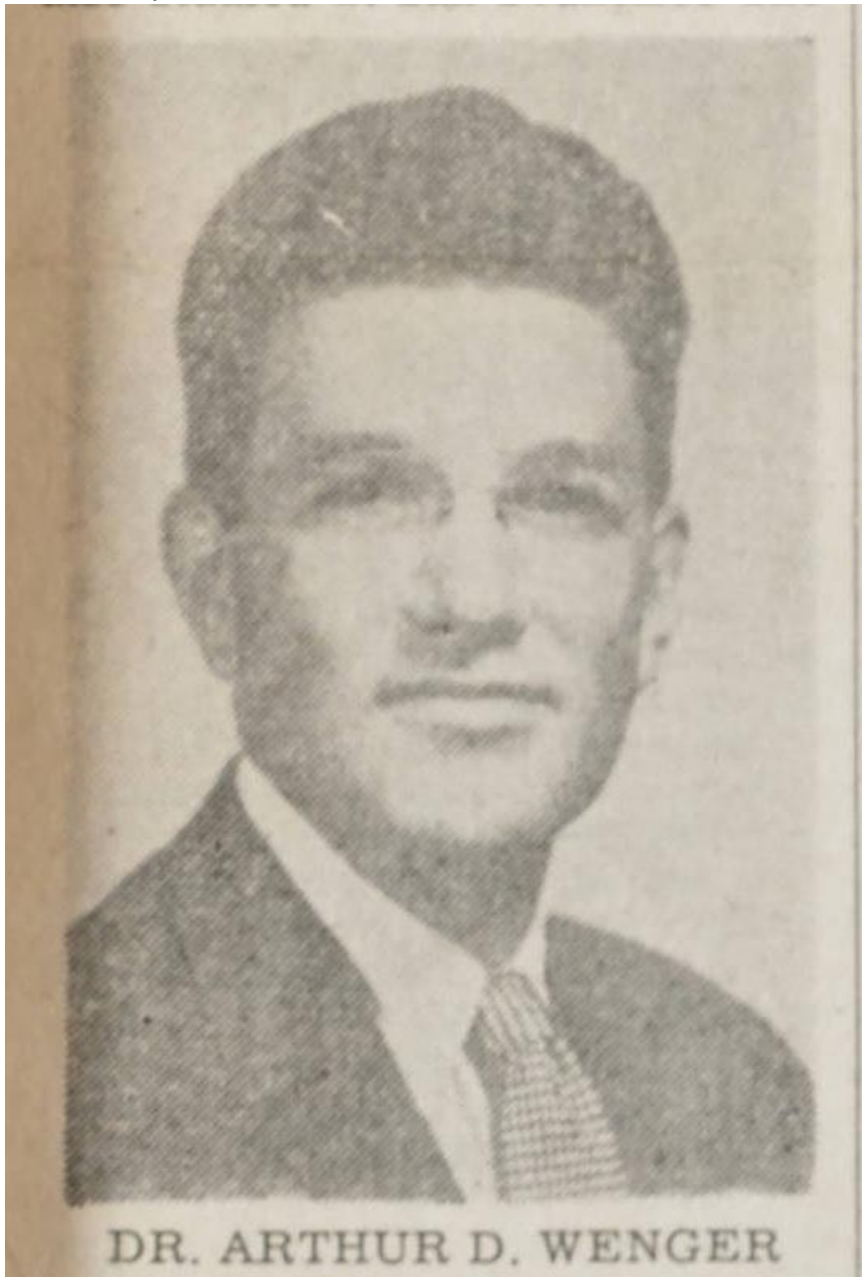


Image of Arthur Daniel Wenger, from Atlantic Christian College (Barton College) 1956, [p.1], published in 1956 by Atlantic Christian College Student Newspaper. Presented on Digital North Carolina.

^[5]

From 1944 to 1946 Wenger was a captain in the Army Chaplains Corps and served with combat infantry units in Western Europe during the final year of World War II ^[6]. On his return in 1946, he was ordained to the ministry of the Christian

Churches (Disciples of Christ) and attended [Brite College of the Bible](#)^[7], [Texas Christian University](#)^[8], earning a B.D. degree in 1948. He served the Christian Church of Hamilton, Tex. (1948–49), before becoming associate minister of First Christian Church in New Castle, Pa., in 1949.

Wenger entered the ministry of higher education in 1950, when he was appointed assistant to the president of Atlantic Christian College (now [Barton College](#)^[9]) in [Wilson](#)^[10], N.C. He then moved to Texas Christian University as director of promotion (1952–56) and director of religious activities (1954–56).

In 1956 he was called to be the eighth president of Atlantic Christian College, a position he filled until his death in his twenty-first year in office. During the two decades of his administration he was influential in the development of the institution, in higher education in North Carolina, in civic affairs in Wilson, and in his church from the local to the national level.

Under his leadership the college, with very limited resources, developed a sound financial foundation by means of a Fifteen-Year Development Program and balanced budgets. Development of the campus facilities—four dormitories, a library, a gymnasium, a student center, and four classroom buildings—was a major achievement. Accreditation by the [Southern Association of Colleges and Universities](#)^[11] was obtained in 1956 and renewed thereafter. The programs of nursing, art, and teacher education also were accredited.

President Wenger guided the college into sound development during the educational expansion of the fifties and sixties and prepared it to meet the decline of the seventies without serious problems. He insisted that religion was not solely an academic field to be studied, but an influence to permeate the campus. A vigorous, optimistic personality, strong religious commitment, and spirit of service made a lasting impression on students and faculty alike.

His wisdom, public-speaking ability, and temperament facilitated Wenger's leadership in higher education in the state. He was a North Carolina delegate to the National Education Compact of the States (1956); president of the North Carolina Council of Church-Related Colleges (1959), [North Carolina Association of Colleges and Universities](#)^[12] (1965–66), and Association of Eastern North Carolina Colleges (1969–70); and a prominent member of the board of directors of the [North Carolina State Educational Assistance Authority](#)^[13] (1966–71). He was active in the formation of the [North Carolina Association of Independent Colleges and Universities](#)^[14]; while serving as president (1972–74), he pioneered the development of the [Legislative Tuition Grants Program](#)^[15] for students attending private colleges and universities. At his death he was the dean of college presidents in the state, and often his peers had called upon him for counsel.

In Wilson his interests included the [Chamber of Commerce](#)^[16] (board of directors), [Arts Council](#)^[17] (president, 1968–69), Salvation Army Advisory Board, Boy Scouts of America (Eastern North Carolina Council), and [Wilson County United Fund](#)^[18]. He also sat on the [Wilson County Economic Development Council](#)^[19] and was president of the Wilson Rotary Club.

As a member of the Christian Churches, Wenger served as elder in First Christian Church, Wilson, as well as on the board of the North Carolina Christian Churches, the [Board of Higher Education of the Christian Churches](#)^[20] (chairman, 1959), and the [General Board of Christian Churches](#)^[21]. He was active in the Commission on Brotherhood Restructure, which conducted a reorganization of the Christian Churches. For his achievements he received the LL.D. degree from Texas Christian University (1956) and the Litt.D. from [William Woods College](#)^[22], Fulton, Mo. (1975). He was one of three recipients of the Texas Christian University Distinguished Alumnus Award and a member of Delta Sigma Phi fraternity and Alpha Psi Omega honorary drama fraternity.

On 29 May 1944 he married Doris Kellenbarger, of Kansas, a graduate of Bethel College. They had three children: Arthur Frank, Jon Michael, and Mark Randolph. Wenger was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Wilson.

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