



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF HILDA CARPER

WHEREAS, visionary and life-long Mennonite member, Hilda Carper, died on December 22, 2021 surrounded by loved ones at the age of 94; and

WHEREAS, Hilda was born on March 4, 1927 in an unheated bedroom of an old farmhouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. She was the third of four children, Ruth, Jimmy, Hilda, and Jean. They lived in an isolated farmhouse that did not have running water or electricity until she was seven. Her mother was a schoolteacher in addition to being a housewife and mother. Her father grew up on a Mennonite farm and never went past 8th grade in school. When she was 12, Hilda moved with her family to a Mennonite community in southeastern Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Hilda attended Eastern Mennonite University for a year before stopping to teach at the parochial school started by her mother for their home church. She returned to Goshen College where she graduated in 1950. From 1953-1957, she lived in Basel, Switzerland. There she wrote Bible lessons for children that were translated into German and French, for use in Mennonite and other European free churches. There were three women on staff who became lifelong friends. They lived together with other Mennonite Central Committee workers as a household; and

WHEREAS, when she returned to the United States, she was invited by John Miller and his wife Louise, to join their fledgling community in Evanston, Illinois. She, John, and Louise had been part of a “dreamers’ group” in Basel that would gather to talk about how to reform the Mennonite Church via intentional community. She joined them in 1959 at the newly created Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston, an Intentional Christian community of members who live and work together, freely sharing life and resources with one another, and with their neighbors to demonstrate God’s peace and justice in the world; and

WHEREAS, Hilda first worked at Church of Hope on Peoria Street in Chicago with Julius and Peggy Belser who were establishing an intentional community in Chicago with African American members from the neighborhood. During this time, she directed a children’s choir, comprised of neighborhood children, which became very good. They received invitations to sing at many suburban churches around Chicago and were invited to sing on TV, including a performance at a circus at the Medina Temple in Chicago. In 1965, urban renewal slated the Peoria Street area to be demolished to make room the University of Illinois’ Circle Campus. Church of Hope was coming to an end; and

WHEREAS, after the Church of Hope closed, Hilda moved to 727 Reba Place where she lived on the third floor and immediately began transforming the first floor into a daycare center. Reba Place, as it was then known, grew and continues to serve the Evanston community as the Reba Early Learning Center; and

WHEREAS, in the early eighties, a seminary student and pastor of Lake Street Church decided that Evanston needed a homeless shelter. After some challenges with the city, a shelter was formed in the Lake Street Church basement. Hilda became a volunteer at the shelter. By then, she had moved to the Clearing, another intentional living community associated with Reba Place. They had many homeless people coming to The Clearing for help and she wanted to find a way to support the homeless population in a more stable and sustainable way. She began volunteering at the shelter by starting a breakfast program there; and

WHEREAS, when volunteers at the shelter became overwhelmed by the need, Hilda was asked to become its director.

She became the first paid staff person for Evanston's Connections for the Homeless in 1984. The shelter, Hilda's Place provides transitional housing for qualified single men and women for whom permanent housing is not yet available. They serve 20 participants, who typically remain for three months before moving into their own housing. Because of her work in establishing and running the shelter, the Connections for the Homeless board named it "Hilda's Place" in her honor. In addition to the transitional shelter, Hilda's Place has a drop-in site, bag lunches for those in need, and a food pantry. The shelter continues to serve people in need out of the basement of the Lake Street Church; and

WHEREAS, music was always important to Hilda. When she first came to Chicago, she was accepted into and sang with the Chicago Symphony Chorus for ten years; and

WHEREAS, Hilda is survived by her sister, Jean Miller, other residents of The Clearing, and members of the Mennonite ministry in Evanston and throughout the world.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County, honors the life, work, and contributions of Hilda Carper, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions she made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a suitable copy of this Resolution be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and that an official copy of same be tendered to the family of the Hilda Carper.