“Spaces are transformed into places when we ascribe to them our community identity and deepest held values. By naming this room in honor of Chaplain Emeritus Richard McBride, this space and the activities to occur here will reflect his spirit and the high principles by which he lives. So this PLACE, like Richard, will be warm and welcoming of every person. Like the explorer and seeker of truth Richard is, this place will encourage students to explore issues of purpose and meaning and come together to experience the joy of community.

When Richard arrived at Elon in 1984, former President Fred Young charged him with doing lots of programs, and programs he did. His first office was but one room on the first floor of Whitley. We used to call Richard “the lone ranger,” as he alone was the counseling staff, the service learning office, and the religious life office, as well as a professor in religious studies. Today, we have an excellent, comprehensive counseling center, the nationally acclaimed Kermode Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement, and an endowed program for spiritual & religious life--the Truitt Center. And now there are 6 chaplains, and a bouquet of part-time ministers from local area congregations. There are 16 religious and spiritual life student organizations, and a host of events Richard created which are now Elon traditions.

For example, he created the Hometown Heroes for first year students to honor individuals who made a difference in their lives and hometowns. For juniors he initiated the Turning 21 program as a “rite of passage” into adulthood for students to mark their 21st birthdays by honoring their mentors. These, as well as many, many other events Richard created continue to help students to discover more fully who they are, value life’s transitions, and celebrate community.

Another lasting contribution of Richard’s was to enable the university to fulfill its mission of service to others at a new level. To celebrate Elon’s bicentennial in 1988, he brought former President Jimmy Carter to campus. Richard had just founded the Alamance County and the Elon College chapter of Habitat for Humanity, which is the only collegiate chapter in the nation to not only build a house each year, but to also raise the $30,000 needed to do so. This spring our collegiate chapter will opened its 22nd house. Carter’s visit ignited the service passion of our students, and as a result Richard envisioned Elon’s student-run service movement, Elon Volunteers! He has led countless service trips and was one of the first to develop an international service-learning course, the Guatemala course. Richard led this course for many years, and he and Wendy continue to lead domestic and international service trips a couple of times each year. What a treat for our students!
Richard was a public figure and a man of words while at Elon. Through his kind and non-judgmental presence he created a space for us to reflect upon and explore our own spirituality, no matter what our beliefs. His reflections every year at the opening of the university, at every convocation and at the monthly faculty meetings each had a carefully crafted and thought-provoking message of relevance to the events on campus or in the world.

And finally, of all of his accomplishments, I think one of Richard’s greatest legacies is the pastoral role he played in so many lives. He walked alongside us as we celebrated accomplishments and when we grieved tremendous losses. His knack for coming up with just the right words- the right choice and amount of words- no matter what the situation, is a gift to this community. No one has illustrated this gift more powerfully than Carolyn Nelson, a recent retiree of Elon and close personal friend and comrade of Richard, who compared his prayers to poetry. She said:

His eloquent words and plain truths speak to the heart, soul and the intellect in equal measure. He does, in fact, lead us to still waters. And just when you think you have found a clear reflection, there is a ripple and he rearranges the colors in a whole new light. And so it is with Richard: still water…. steady current….. bright spirit.

Richard, you have been, and continue to be, in profound ways, an integral part of Elon, and we look forward to the blessing of your and Wendy’s presence often in this special gathering room that will carry not only your name, but your spirit.