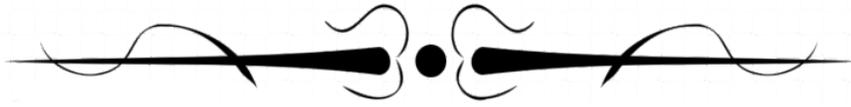
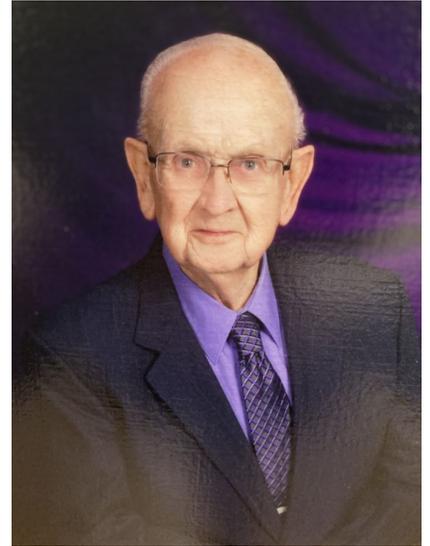


# J. Gordon Christianson



*August 12, 1926 - February 19, 2021*

Marcia, Mary, Jenny, Andy, Amanda, Matt, Lizzy, family and friends, grace and peace to you from the one who lived for us, who died for us, and who now claims victory over every grave, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



The Apostle Paul in Romans talks about the personal gifts in our lives. He writes: “We are one body in Christ. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

We’ve seen many of these gifts in one person – J. Gordon Christianson. One of Gordon’s main gifts, of course, was teaching. That gift was nurtured while growing up on a farm near Scarville, Iowa. It’s not everyone who’s valedictorian of his class, even if there were only five in the class. It’s not everyone who graduates from Luther College in Decorah. It’s not everyone who’s served his country in the Navy in World War II.

But beyond these experiences, I’d like to think that Gordon’s teaching career really took off when he returned from his military duty. One evening he and a cousin were cruising the streets of Forest City. They happened upon three young women who were walking downtown. Let’s just say, they knew a good thing when they saw it. Before you know it, the guys pulled over and talked to them. One of them was named Agnes. The conversation was going well, so well that Gordon invited them to go dancing at the Surf Club in Clear Lake. “Can you dance?” asked Agnes. “Sure I can” said Gordon, only half telling the truth. When Agnes later recalled the event, she’d say, “Gordon told me he was a dancer, but after we got married, he never seemed to want to go.” As the years passed, the family explained Gordon’s dancing prowess in this way: Mom went for the dancing; dad went for the socializing.

As it turns out, Gordon and Agnes got married in June of 1949. Agnes was a teacher. Gordon was a teacher too. Even though Gordon spent a number of years on the administrative side of things, he was always a teacher and learner at heart. Whether he was reading National Geographic, or traveling to Siberia to study their educational system, or gathering for men’s Bible study on Tuesday morning at Zumbro, Gordon wanted to learn, and in the process, he asked questions and freely shared what he knew with those around him.

A big part of Gordon's teaching stemmed from connecting with people. Our mission statement at Zumbro starts out like this: *Our journey of faith leads us to build bridges of understanding and peace...* We didn't plan it this way, but Gordon was a living embodiment of our mission. Whether he was meeting people on the elevator at the Charter House, or welcoming visitors to the Mayo Clinic Heritage Museum, or dreaming up an exchange program between high school students in Decorah and a little town in Norway, it takes a lot of time and energy to be a connector of people.

Before Covid, I used to do a Friday afternoon worship service at the Charter House. We had it once a month. People would gather in their seats. Worship was about to begin. But we kept the doors open for an extra minute or two. You see, Gordon would invariably come racing in on his scooter, a minute or two late, as if he had to finish up three or four things before he could come to church. I'm exaggerating slightly, but there were a few times when I thought we might have to give him a speeding ticket on that scooter of his. But here's the way I came to see it: when you've got connections to make and bridges to build, it probably takes an extra minute or two to move on to your next assignment.

In his book *Fully Human, Fully Alive*, author John Powell writes some touching words: "The size of a person's world is the size of his or her heart." As we hear about Gordon, we get the sense that his heart was big and wide, but he always seemed ready to fit in one more person or thing. All you needed do was mention Marcia and Mary; the five grandchildren; the two great-grandchildren; and of course, his beloved Agnes. If you mentioned any of these persons and more, then you better sit down and pour a cup of coffee because there would be stories to tell and love to share. Yes, there was always room in Gordon's great big, soft heart.

I received a letter from Gordon in April of 2014. He wrote it early on Easter Sunday. No, Mary, he wasn't Facetiming me at 5:00 in the morning like he did to you, but it might have been close. He was thanking me and the Zumbro pastors for the three days of Holy Week leading up to Easter. He wrote: "I send deepest thanks to you, Pastor Vern, for the warm farewell you said to me on Saturday evening as we all left the service - your comments about my wife, Agnes, now being in heaven meant a lot to me."

Now, I'll be honest, I don't remember saying those words, but Gordon did, and like so many things in his life, he used them as a way to ground himself - to keep learning, to keep connecting, to build yet another bridge of understanding and peace. He mentioned Joan in the letter as well, and joining the family for Easter worship at the first service. That might seem like a long time ago, but you know what I'm trying to say: This was Gordon's way of remembering and giving thanks. And he was helping the rest of us stay grounded too.

Amen.

Pastor Vern Christopherson  
August 13, 2021