



Reverend John Franklin McCleary Jr.

October 31, 1927 - August 1, 2015

Biography of Rev. John McCleary

October 31, 1927 - August 1, 2015

John Franklin McCleary was born on October 31, 1927 in West Grove, Pennsylvania to John Franklin McCleary and Marion McCleary. He spent his childhood on Peacedale Farm in Elk Township, Oxford, PA, learning in a one-room country schoolhouse. When John was entering his teenage years, World War II was raging. As John was graduating from Oxford High School in 1945 he had already enlisted in the U.S. Army. John was sent to Virginia Military Institute for Officer Training and, after the war ended, was honorably discharged from Fort Lee with the rank of Staff Sergeant.

John had a keen mind and loved learning. While waiting for funding from the GI Bill, he began studying at Beacon Business College in Wilmington, DE. In short time he had graduated and went on to study at Lafayette College in Easton, PA. John graduated with honors in 1952 with a BA degree in English Literature; he also was awarded the Greek Prize at graduation.

One summer John met Lila Pittenger of Chickasha, Oklahoma as they were both serving in Tupelo, Mississippi with the Presbyterian Board of National Missions. For two years while in college they wrote each other a letter every day, with John at Lafayette and Lila at The College of Wooster in Ohio. On August 23, 1952 they were married in the New London Presbyterian Church. John responded to the calling he felt to serve in Christian ministry, and Lila to teaching English Literature. The couple enjoyed sharing in each others' work

and company, reading, lifelong learning, and traveling. At the time of John's death Lila and John were nearing their 63rd anniversary.

For ministry preparation John attended Princeton Theological Seminary, earning his Divinity Degree in June 1955 and his Masters of Theology Degree in 1969. John began serving churches while in seminary with a two-year student pastorate in Tuckerton, NJ.

On May 22, 1955, John was ordained into Christian Ministry at the New London Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Chester. After seminary he began serving at the Old Manokin Presbyterian Church in Princess Anne, Maryland, followed by the Elsmere Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware. His longest ministry came at Llanerch Presbyterian Church in Havertown, Pennsylvania, serving for 30 years as Minister.

John was also active in the Presbytery, often behind the scenes. He served as The Stated Clerk of New Castle Presbytery and as interim Stated Clerk in Philadelphia Presbytery.

After retiring from active ministry, Rev. McCleary continued to serve in various ways, particularly enjoying serving as teacher-in-residence at the Newtown Square Presbyterian Church. Aside from church work, for over 40 years John spent many hours assisting the Scotch-Irish Society of the U.S.A. For over 10 years he also volunteered one day a week in The Union League library. Even as a young man John was known for his maturity, wisdom, wit, and principled leadership. His trademark sermons were thoughtful, studied, and based upon Biblical texts that inspired and educated people in following Christ.

In his leadership John would act on principle, responding to what he believed was right. He served in an unpretentious manner that called attention to what John believed needed to be done rather than to himself. For instance, while serving in Princess Anne, Maryland, John saw the plight of the Eastern Shore migrant workers. John sought guidance with the National Council of Churches in Washington, D.C. He began working to build racial and cultural understanding within his own church and community.

In the 1964 the Presbyterian Church asked John to be part of the Phil-American (Philippine Islands) team serving in Bohol, leaving the Elsmere Presbyterian Church for this assignment. Upon finishing this work John returned home, taking time to travel in many countries around the world. In October 2008 John and Lila moved to Dunwoody Village. In December 2009 John fell on black ice. His injuries from this fall and complications necessitated a permanent move to the medical unit of Dunwoody Village where he lived until his death. However, most of those years were spent in pleasant pursuits, sharing and teaching about his interests and travels. In his latter years John began developing dementia mixed with periods of clarity. Despite this he continued to be of help to those around him by sharing his wisdom, kindness, and concern. After suffering a stroke, John McCleary passed away peacefully with his wife at his side in the evening hours of August 1, 2015.

His Funeral Service will be held on Thursday August 6th, at 10 AM in The Presbyterian Church of Llanerch, 211 Lansdowne Rd, Havertown, PA 19083, where the family will receive guests following the Service. Burial will be private in New London Presbyterian Churchyard.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in his memory to either The Presbyterian Church of Llanerch, Dunwoody Village Memorial Garden, 3500 West Chester Pike, Newtown Square, PA 19073 or Canine Partners for Life, PO Box 170, Cochranville, PA 19330.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

AUG 6. 10:00 AM (ET)

The Presbyterian Church of Llanerch
211 Lansdowne Rd.
Havertown, PA 19083

Tribute Wall

DA

“ Dear Lila,

The spring of 2008 marks the last time Sherry and I were fortunate to have spent with you and John. Sherry was ministering to two churches south of Sunbury, PA, and you and John were preparing to move from your home on Broom Street to your retirement home in Dunwoody. John had packed some theology books he thought might be of interest to Sherry and we had driven down to relieve you of two or three boxes. At the time, a physical quirk was forcing you to negotiate the stairs on your "bumper." Yet, you had "prepared" a lovely lunch that we shared at a small luncheonette a short drive from home.

As lunch rolled along we found ourselves sharing pet tales, precipitated, I believe, by the more recent nocturnal cavorting and meowing of your cat who had awakened and alerted you to an ongoing emergency. One of you had fallen or had suddenly been taken ill and the remarkable cat had saved the day. I have little recall of the food, but the mementos of our encounter were pet stories, capable of evoking such fondness and joy. The prescience and dedication of the pets who have shared our lives, continues to bring a memorable texture to that lovely, well spent afternoon in May.

After lunch, John went to get the car whilst the three of us waited curbside, chatting. In memory, John seems to have swooped down upon us and, compliantly, we opened the broad doors and piled in. Having halted only momentarily, John returned to swoop mode and the car took off. But the rear passenger door was still fully open and we soon realized that you had been left standing, expectantly, on the curb. After much shouted alarm and pointed gesticulation, the car circled around and returned, open door still swinging wide. The car braked, and somewhere between laughter and annoyance, you yelled "John!" jumped onto the back seat and simultaneously slammed the door shut, re-arranged your skirt, and resumed our conversation.

When we learned that John had died, my mind went immediately to the afternoon hours of that spring day...to a couple who, over the course of a long and healthy marriage and upon the eve of their formal retirement, were continuing to enjoy good friends, good books, good food, good conversation, and good laughter.

We hope that as you continue to navigate the swells and tides of John's absence, that particular mementos of times past and particular memories of shared laughter and joy will bring solace to your days and peace to your nights.

With much love,

Dave and Sherry Elliott

*118 South 21st Street, Apt 1006
Philadelphia, PA 19103*

Sent from my iPad

David - August 27, 2015 at 03:58 PM

TO

“*As a staff member in the Recreation Department at Dunwoody, I enjoyed the Reverend's stories and anecdotes of growing up and working on his parents' farm. We also shared stories of World War II and the heroes of the Greatest Generation. I will miss him!*

Tony T.

Tony - August 10, 2015 at 03:52 PM

LM

“ So sorry to hear of Mr McCleary's passing. He officiated at our wedding fifty-one years ago last month. I will always remember his kindness shown towards our family. My Mother always treasured her continued association with Mr and Mrs McCleary after his retirement. We send our thoughts and prayers to Mrs McCleary.
Linda and Robert Mallis

Linda Mallis - August 06, 2015 at 05:07 PM

VE

“ Mr. McCleary officiated our wedding in Anacortes, Washington, in April 1999 at a Presbyterian church near the entrance to the San Juan islands. It was a wonderful wedding and Mr. McCleary's inspirational words will live with us forever. Together with Mrs. McCleary, he toured Washington State after the wedding and told us of their visit to McCleary, Washington, on the way to the Pacific coast. He talked about meeting some of the townspeople and asking about how the town got his name. We were inspired by his interest in history that motivated him into conversation with strangers of that town, his namesake. I (Vera) was inspired by many of Mr. McCleary's sermons while growing up at Llanerch and was so incredibly thrilled and grateful that he agreed to travel to Seattle with Mrs McCleary to be a part of our wedding ceremony.

With love and in memory of an amazing man, Vera Trainer and Len Kannapell (with children Roberto and Stephanny)

vera - August 05, 2015 at 09:54 PM

SP

“ *I'm so sorry to hear about Mr. McCleary's passing. We know he is in good hands. I am glad I was able to be a part of his congregation. I thank him for his guidance and gentle spirit. Most of all he performed the marriage ceremony which brought my late husband and I together. Mrs. McCleary, my thoughts and prayers are with you and your family. Sandy (Flickinger) Pollag*

Sandy Pollag - August 04, 2015 at 03:22 PM