

Reverend Graden John Grobe

Sunrise September 12, 1921



Sunset January 21, 2020 (age 98)

Obituary

The Reverend Graden John Grobe; A Friend Who Walked and Talked with God

Graden's Family Motto: "Only one life 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." by C.T. Studd

Graden was a friend to the lost, the homeless, the disenfranchised, the hopeless, the suffering, the lonely, the impoverished, the disabled, the incarcerated, the condemned. Graden's life mission was to bring compassion to all those who suffer.

Graden John Grobe, age 98, passed away on January 21, 2020 at the Benedictine Health Center in Duluth, Minnesota. He was born in Waterloo, Iowa to William Joseph Grobe and Bonney Beal Grobe on September 12, 1921. Graduating from Duluth Central High School in 1939, Macalester College in 1944 (a Presbyterian school), and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1946, he was ordained at Duluth's First Presbyterian Church in 1946 joining his older brother Bill in the Presbyterian ministry.

Graden's public service spanned more than 75 years. As a boy he lived with his family onsite at the Duluth Bethel Society Gospel Mission on Mesaba Avenue in Duluth where his father, William, was the mission superintendent.

During Graden's youth, First Presbyterian Church was a dynamic spiritual power house - a nationally recognized church community that excelled in nurturing, training and mentoring future Christian leaders. The Bethel Mission was founded by the First Presbyterian congregation as a missionary outreach to seamen and lumberjacks. Graden, his big brother Bill, and little sister Donella were raised in the Gospel Mission while being daily groomed in the lineage of the First Presbyterian Church to be "Christian Soldiers of the Cross".

They followed in the evangelical, ministerial footsteps of their father William, a lay pastor and their grandfather who started German speaking churches in the late 1800's in Iowa and the Dakotas. Their mother Bonney taught Child Evangelism classes using object lessons and flannel graphs to illustrate Bible stories to children. She also mentored future spiritual leaders who went on to develop innovative spirit filled movements in Duluth and throughout the world.

In 1953 Graden was appointed Executive Director of the Duluth Bethel Society where he served alongside his father. They continued The Bethel's long affiliation with the International Union of Gospel Missions. Graden's faithful 19 years of service as Executive Director brought The Bethel Mission into a more contemporary spiritual ministry. From the mission's inception in the late 19th century, the gospel was shared through the Duluth Bethel Society's legacy of community service programs. Hundreds of thousands of meals and sleeping accommodations were provided to homeless and destitute men

Graden continued this decades-long public service street ministry to Duluth's lost and forgotten men while advancing the Bethel Society's ministry to women through The Women's Home at Hillcrest House. There, unwed mothers were supported during pregnancy. The Women's Home also provided a nursery for the care of disabled infants. Other Bethel programs facilitated by Graden included the Bethel Sunday School, serving a large community of youth from preschool to high school each Sunday at 3pm. Bethel Camp was a summer highlight with its week-long camping tradition begun in the 1920's for Duluth's low income youth. The camp was free to all who memorized an entire single-spaced legal sized sheet of Bible Verses. In 1959 Graden guided the establishment of the Bethel's Lake Venoh Farm located near Carlton, Minnesota providing innovative retreat for alcoholic sobriety and recovery.

During his life Graden pastored five churches. The first at age nineteen was at Randall Presbyterian Church, in Randall, Minnesota as a Macalester College freshman. He then served Mount Airy Presbyterian Church, in Mount Airy, New Jersey while a Princeton Seminary student. He was then called to the First Presbyterian Church, in Alta, Iowa followed by Sibley Presbyterian Church in Sibley, Iowa. Most recently he served the Pike Lake Presbyterian Church in Duluth, Minnesota which he helped establish and later pastor. Graden also chaired the selection committee for the Presbytery of Northern Waters and provided interdenominational pulpit supply at regional churches for 60 years. Graden was the founder and chaplain at the Agape House of Hope which for 33 years has provided complimentary lodging to families visiting inmates at The Duluth Federal

Prison Camp. He served as a Duluth Federal Prison Camp Chaplain for 25 years and was a dedicated Duluth Rotarian for 50 years.

Although not a member, Graden was a strong supporter and early catalyst in the introduction and development of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement in Duluth. As a Reverend and Chaplain, Graden provided "Fifth Steps" to AA members for over 50 years.

In 1965 at the Lorin Whitney Recording Studio, Glendale, California Graden recorded two vocal albums with his wife Betty at the piano along with renowned organist Lorin Whitney at the pipe organ: "To My Friends", and "To My Friends Songs of Christmas". In 1970 he returned to the studio to record a third album: "To My Friends ... More Favorites".

Throughout his ministry Graden's bass vocals and Betty's inspired piano accompaniment blessed regional weddings, funerals, and senior-care homes with their musical ministry. Graden's family was central to his sense of purpose. It was his delight to integrate his family into the arch of his ministry in a most unique way. Christian service was his life and therefore it was his family's life as well. Ironically this way of living provided exceptional opportunity but also required personal sacrifice.

At UMD Graden established one of the first chapters of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in the nation. The University of Minnesota Duluth was then known as the Duluth Teachers College. There, Graden met his life partner, the talented pianist Betty Johnson. Graden was also a co-founder of Duluth's WWJC Christian Radio Station.

Inspired in the 1970's by "The Jesus House" on East Fourth Street, Graden and his mother, Bonney, helped seed a street ministry which later became Duluth's Vineyard Church. In addition, he served on numerous community boards including U.D.A.C. (a community support program for the developmentally disabled), MP&L's Community Advisory Board, The Agape House of Hope Board, Duluth's Habitat for Humanity Board and The International Association of Gospel Mission Board among other community organizations.

Graden was the recipient of many awards, retiring from active community service at age 92 when he moved to The Advent Christian Village in Dowling Park, Florida. There he enjoyed four years of Christian fellowship as well as daily walks and talks with God, family, and friends as he strolled along Florida's Suwannee River.

Graden was preceded in death by his parents William Joseph Grobe (lay pastor) and Bonney Beal Grobe, as well as his wife of 68 years, Betty Johnson Grobe, his brother The Reverend William Grobe, his sister The Reverend Donella Grobe Siktberg, and sister-in-law Lois H. Johnson.

Graden is survived by his three children: John Graden Grobe of Silver Bay, Minnesota; Beth Grobe Magomolla of Solon Springs, Wisconsin; and Bonney Faith Esbensen of Maui, Hawaii as well as four grandchildren: Nikola and Estee-Maria Piguet, Malaika and Makeela Magomolla.

Other surviving relatives include his niece and nephews: Bill Grobe of St Louis Park, Minnesota; Bob Grobe of Chaska, Minnesota; Nathan Siktberg of Boston, Massachusetts; Dan Siktberg of Lowell, Massachusetts; and Linda-Beth Johnson Riggs of Houston, Texas. Also surviving Graden is his long-time friend and advocate John Munter of Warba, Minnesota and son-in-law Immanueli Magomolla, of Duluth, Minnesota. Please share your memories of Graden with Graden's family. Online condolences, and photos may be sent to SunriseFuneralHomeandCemetery.com.

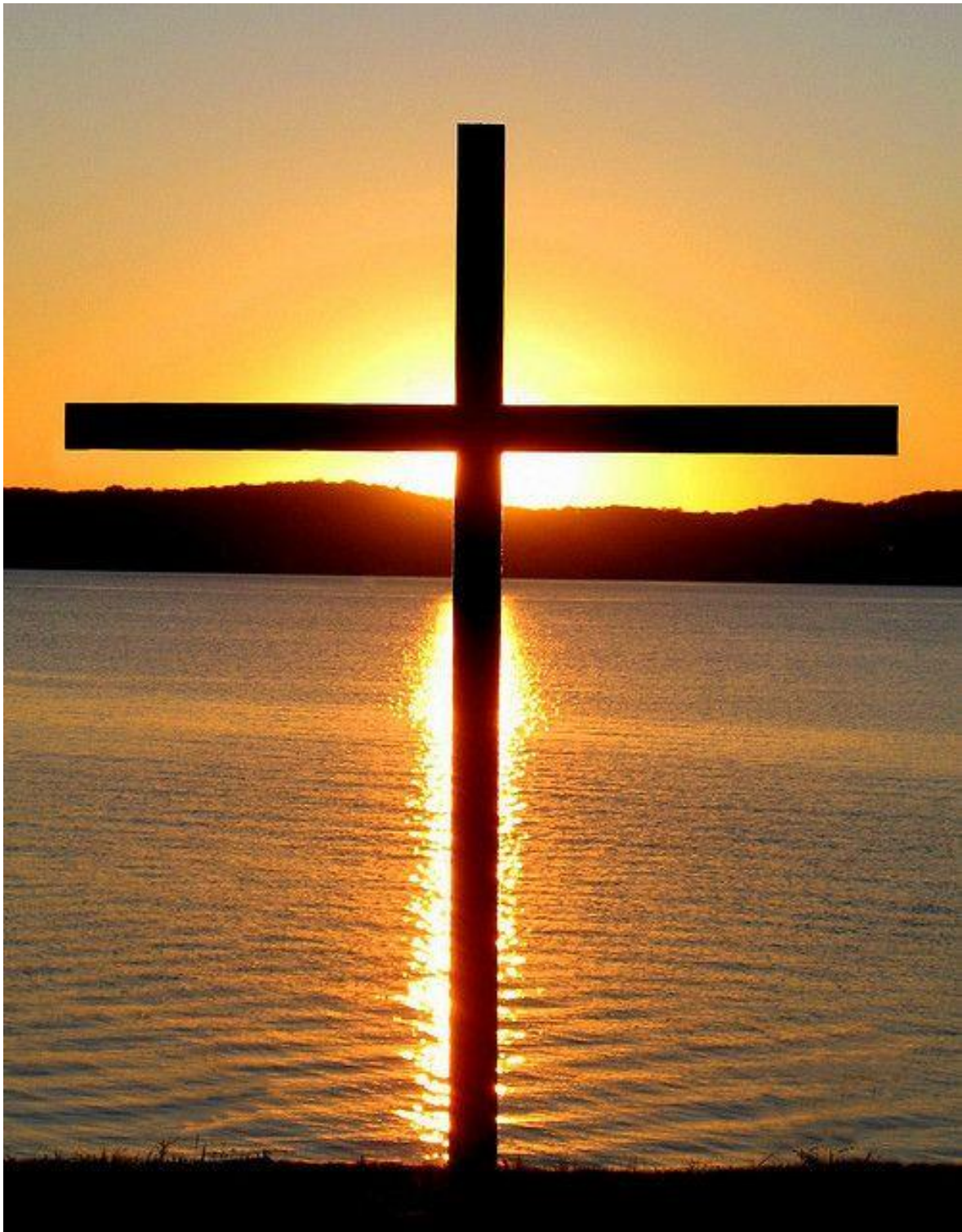
A memoriam to advance Graden's musical ministry may be sent by USPS postal or by email to The Duluth Bethel:

Duluth Bethel, 23 Mesaba Ave, Duluth Minnesota, 55806 Attention: Dennis Cummings

Website: www.DuluthBethel.org

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