

Service to Celebrate the Life of
John Henry Stevens

July 14, 1938 – December 2, 2023



Friday, April 12, 2024 • 1:30 p.m.
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Order of Worship

Prelude

Introit, *The Strife is O'er*

Robert J. Powell

Welcome and Prayer

Tim McConnell

Hymn No. 136, *Holy, Holy, Holy! verses 1 & 4*

Psalm 121, selected scriptures

Pat Hartsock

Anthem, *The Lord Is My Shepherd*

Allen Pote

Vonda Barnhart

Remembrances

Ron White, Warren Roach, John Goodale

Solo, *It Is Well With My Soul*

arr. David Clydesdale

Mark Epperson

A Wise Architect, and a Firm Foundation

1 Corinthians 3:9-17

Jim Edwards

Prayer of Commendation

Benediction

Anthem, *When the Saints Go Marching In*

arr. John Rutter

Postlude



Officiants: **Rev. Dr. Tim McConnell**
 Rev. Dr. John Goodale
 Rev. Dr. Pat Hartsock
 Dr. Jim Edwards

Organist: **Mr. Jamal Sarikoki**

Pianist: **Mr. Adam Haas**

Soloists: **Mrs. Vonda Barnhart**
 Mr. Mark Epperson

Coordinators: **Mrs. Gladeen Ragland**
 Rev. Linda Boyles
 Mrs. Roseann Engelage

*You are invited to join the family for a time of
fellowship and refreshments in the Worship Center
immediately following the service.*

The Reverend Dr. John H. Stevens, the long-time pioneering pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs whose 36-year ministry helped transform the city and whose messages gladdened the hearts of both the happy and the hurting, slipped away peacefully at the Mount St. Francis Nursing Center. He was 85.

Born in St. Claire Shores, Michigan, the only child of Henry and Helen Stevens, John's future was forever changed when his father, an employee of the Ford Motor Company, contracted spinal meningitis, paralyzing him from the waist down. When doctors told his father the only relief or hope of healing would be found in a warmer, drier climate, the family headed for Hollywood, California, where a relative helped arrange housing and a sedentary job for his dad as a lighting technician at Columbia Pictures. Due to World War II rationing, the journey west was made possible thanks to friends and neighbors donating their allotment of gas coupons.

The warm sun and access to the era's movie stars captivated the attention of 5-year-old John. Growing up in an apartment across from the studio, John joined a stable of kids who were regularly pulled on as extras in a wide array of movies, including *All The King's Men*, *The Good Humor Man*, and several films with John Wayne. While standing outside Schwab's Pharmacy, a legendary neighborhood and industry hangout, a blond starlet drove up in a pink convertible and greeted the now 13-year-old. "Hello dahling!" said Zsa Zsa Gabor.

John would forever credit his Le Conte Middle School music teacher, Mae Nightingale, for his love of music, especially opera and choral arrangements. Concerts at the Hollywood Bowl fed what would become a lifelong interest. He remained in touch with "Miss Nightingale" until her death many decades later.

First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood would prove to be an even greater influence in his young life. Sitting under the teachings of senior pastors Dr. Louis Evans, Dr. Raymond Lindquist, and legendary Sunday school teacher Henrietta Mears, the seeds of his own future ministry were sowed, planted and watered. John attended and graduated from Hollywood High, crossing paths with the likes of Carol Burnett, Natalie Wood, and David and Ricky Nelson.

Studying prelaw at the University of California Santa Barbara, and while attending a Lambda Chi Alpha party at the Plow and Angel Bar inside the San Ysidro Ranch Hotel, John felt an overwhelming spiritual conviction. He immediately left the bar (and his date!), returned home, got down on his knees, and committed the rest of his life to the Lord.

Following a two-year stint in the U. S. Army, where John excelled as a sharpshooter and attained the rank of first lieutenant, he enrolled in Princeton Seminary. Upon graduation, he joined the staff at East San Diego Presbyterian Church, where he served in a variety of roles including youth pastor. Eager to meet his future wife, John confided in a friend while attending a church-sponsored camp at the Big Bear Lake Conference Center. He said he'd love to meet a devout Christian woman who was smart, pretty, and who loved music. The very next day he was introduced to Gail, a recent music major graduate from Stanford University who would join the staff at East San Diego Pres as choir director. Soon after, Gail eagerly accepted John's invitation to spend a day at Disneyland, only to learn a busload of kids from the church youth group would be accompanying them. They were married June 19, 1966.

After a representative from First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs heard John speak at Forest Home Christian Camp, he accepted an invitation to interview for an associate pastor position, reporting to pastor Dr. Howard Hansen.

Charmed by the city's beauty and challenged by the Lord's call, they accepted the opportunity. Dr. Hansen's retirement a year later set up 32-year-old John's unlikely promotion to senior pastor.

Driving home one Sunday after service, John reflected on the tremendous untapped potential of the church. "This is a sleeping giant," he told Gail. "I'm going to wake it up." The next decade would mark the single greatest growth season in congregation history. John would oversee the launch of a divorce recovery workshop, a grief recovery ministry, as well as the establishment of Growing Together Wednesday night fellowship and classes. "Festival of Faith" was a summer program featuring sermons from some of the country's great preachers. John assumed the mantle of someone who championed the city, encouraged the faithful, enthusiastically mentored new pastors and unapologetically and optimistically preached the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Stevens' weekly messages (more than 1,200 across his pastorate), appealed to the congregation's highest hopes. Thousands packed the pews each week to hear him teach and apply the Scriptures to their everyday lives. His sermons were insightful, inspirational, and often infused with gentle and wry humor. One Super Bowl Sunday that featured the Denver Broncos, John remarked, "I don't know what all the fuss is about this weekend." As he spoke, he pulled an orange handkerchief from the sleeve of his black robe.

John was a visionary strategist who enthusiastically championed women in leadership when many did not. Humble but confident in his calling and Christ's sufficiency, John's high attention to detail also helped establish First Pres as a destination church, as well as the place to celebrate Christmas and Easter, when extra services were added to accommodate the thousands who flocked to the corner of Bijou and Nevada.

Often joking he didn't have hobbies but rather interests, John was a loving husband to Gail and a devoted father to Stan and Tim. The family traveled and ministered together. John took interest in what they were interested in – whether skiing or riding roller coasters. He loved to read – and while he left the major cooking to Gail, he perfected the art of grilling a great steak. John had a special relationship with all five of his granddaughters, and they'll miss tea parties, runs to McDonalds, rounds of golf, and sharing videos of their sporting events and music concerts with him.

John stressed the power of relationships and cautioned colleagues to never burn bridges, and to build people up and never tear them down. Due in large part to his highly self-disciplined nature, John made time to contribute beyond his church role, serving on many boards including the local Red Cross, Whitworth College and Aspen Pointe mental health services, as well as chairman of a D11 bond issue.

John is survived by his wife of more than 57 years, Gail Louise; sons Stanford (Susan) and Timothy (Courtney); granddaughters Kelsey, Kendall, Paige, Heidi and Sommer. The family wishes to thank the many wonderful friends who enriched John's life in his years of professional ministry and in retirement. Of particular note are those who visited and supported him in his final months, making the difficulties of disease more bearable. Gratitude also is extended to Paul Batura, who winsomely captured John's life story in this obituary.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that those wishing to offer a memorial gift make a charitable donation to:

The First Presbyterian Church Foundation
219 E. Bijou St., Colorado Springs, CO 80903
firstprescos.org/giving/first-pres-foundation

To plant trees in memory, please visit the Sympathy Store.

More Help When You Are Hurting

Grief Workshop

Are you mourning the death of a loved one or a friend? You don't have to journey alone. The Grief Workshop gives you what you need to move on with new tools for emotional health and a way to share your own story, all on solid Christian foundations. The next seven-week workshop begins September 9.

One on One Encouragement and Support

Stephen Ministers are available to listen and support those experiencing seasons of loss, typically for an hour a week at no cost.

Prayer

Let our Prayer Team pray for you. Email us at prayer@firstprescos.org.

For more information, call Caring Ministries at 719-884-6145.

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES

Online at firstprescos.org/watch at 8:30 and 11 a.m.

In-person Sanctuary: 8:30 & 10 a.m.

In-person Worship Center: 9 & 11 a.m.



FIRST PRES

LIGHT AND LIFE FOR THE CITY