

GEORGE SEVERIN JOHNSON * September 20, 1933 – October 9, 2020

George S. Johnson was a man of multiple names. He was known as Pastor George by many, as “Moses” by teenagers in some of his churches, as “Sonny” by his seven siblings, as “Sweetheart” by Vivian, as “Bumpa” by his grandchildren, and just plain Dad by his children. George died October 9th after living 87 years of commitment to the poor and working for social justice for all. His love of family, and of the people he served, was motivated by his being steeped in the words of the Bible, “Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.”

George was a retired Lutheran pastor who lived with his wife, Vivian, at Regents Point in Irvine, CA. After graduating from Augustana College, the Lutheran Bible Institute, and Luther Seminary (MDiv), he was ordained in 1962. Later, he earned a master of theology (ThM) from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, and a doctor of ministry (DMin) degree from Claremont School of Theology, CA. George served churches in California and Minnesota for more than thirty years. He also served for seven years (1980-1987) as Director of the World Hunger Program for the former American Lutheran Church (now ELCA), that involved extensive global travel, lecturing and writing.

The Johnsons lived in Sweden for a year in 1979, where George did an independent study at the Dag Hammarsjold Institute. George served as advisor to the Committee on Economic Justice at the 1984 Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Budapest, Hungary. He also accompanied C. Dean Freudenberger to Africa to study food, farming, and hunger issues.

After retirement, George served as an interim pastor and, later, as director of Third World Opportunities, where he took groups to Mexico for consciousness raising and service. George received distinguished alumni awards from Augustana Academy and Claremont School of Theology. He was an ardent fan of the San Francisco Giants baseball team and an equally ardent fan of maple nut ice cream.

George is survived by his wife of sixty years, Vivian Elaine, his daughters Sonja Marie Johnson-Egertson (Steve) and Joy Renee Wright (Steve) and grandchildren Todd and Marie Egertson, Matthew (Rachel), Andrew and Mackenzie Wright. George was preceded in death by his son, Todd, who died from cancer on Christmas Eve at age 15, one of the greatest sorrows of his life.

The titles of his published books reveal his concerns and interests. They include:

**Silence Is Not the Answer* (Summit Run Press, 2019)

**Courage to Think Differently* (Bang Printing, 2013, two printings)

**Beyond Guilt: Christian Response to Suffering* (Augsburg Fortress, rev. ed., 2000, five printings)

**How to Start Small Groups and Keep Them Going* (Augsburg Fortress, 1995)

**Following Jesus: Encouragement from the Beatitudes for a Troubled World* (Augsburg Fortress, 1995)

**Critical Decisions in Following Jesus: Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost* (CSS, 1992)

**Evangelism and the Poor: A Biblical Challenge for the Church*, with Ana DeGarcia (Augsburg Fortress, 1986)

George and Vivian moved to Regents Point on October 7, 2016. They believed it was the right move to the right place at the right time. The first year, George enjoyed leading worship services every Sunday morning at Sunridge, the assisted living facility. George often sat on the patio of his villa, wearing a hat, and bathed in sun. He waved to residents and staff as they passed. He liked it. Perhaps they did too.

Memorial suggestions are some of George’s favorite organizations:

The Hunger Program of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), ELCA Gift Processing Center, PO Box 1809, Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Pkwy, Irvine, CA 92604

Southern Poverty Law Center, PO Box 5604, Montgomery, AL 36177-7455

A celebration of life service will be held at a later date.