



Helen "Joan" Larson

September 13, 1931 - February 22, 2026

All tributes should be directed to: West Funeral Home, www.westfuneralhome.com/obituary/Joan-Larson

The Service of Life Celebration for Joan Larson of Ely, MN, will be held Saturday, June 13, at 2:00 p.m. at the Wadena Alliance Church in Wadena. Visitation will be from 12:30 p.m. until the time of service. A fellowship time will follow the service at the church. Interment will follow at the Scandinavian Christian Cemetery in Compton Township, Otter Tail County, MN.

Joan received her complete healing on February 22, 2026, and has claimed her eternal home with her savior, Jesus Christ.

Joan was born in Minneapolis Minnesota on September 13, 1931, to Rev. Jame Gillespie and Helen Dorothy (Lindblad) Baxter. She was the oldest of five children with siblings Grace Ann, James (Jim), Eva Mae and Richard. Her father Rev. James G. Baxter pastored Minnesota churches in Robbinsdale, St. Cloud, Mound and Monterey, CA. It was while her father served the Emmaus Baptist Church in Robbinsdale, MN, that at the age of six Joan professed her faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized. As her father wrote in his memoirs this was, "without prompting or urging."

Joan's elementary education started in the public schools where her family

lived but flourished as she and her brother were enrolled in the Calvert School Home Instruction Course. These studies prepared her to enter high school in 1944 at Robbinsdale High School while living with her grandparents, Jennie and Erhard Lindblad. Her family then moved to California where she attended Monterey High School, Monterey, graduating in 1947. If you do the math, Joan was just 16 years old.

Joan continued her education at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN, receiving her bachelors in Music and English Education. Later, while living in Bemidji and teaching music there, she continued her graduate studies in Music Education at Bemidji State College.

During her second year at Augsburg College she was part of a committee to welcome incoming freshmen students. During this event she was introduced to Benjamin Lawrence Larson from Wadena, who had a beautiful tenor voice. They sang together in the top choir for Augsburg College. Upon graduation they were married at Edina Covenant Church on the evening of June 8, 1951. Ben and Joan enjoyed their gifts of music, sharing them wherever they were. They celebrated with joy the arrival of the three sons: Jonathan in 1955, Richard in 1957, and Steven in 1959.

Following graduation from Augsburg College, Joan began her teaching career in the fall of 1952 at Woodcrest School in Spring Lake Park. This was a newly opened school in the growing northside community of Minneapolis with the returning GI's from World War II. Her first year of teaching was in a 7th grade classroom. The following year came with a recommendation through Augsburg College for a music education position in the Excelsior Junior High in the Minnetonka School District.

In the following years, Ben completed his studies at Bethel Seminary in 1958. He had been called to serve Anoka Covenant Church, and with two young

boys, Joan had to step away from teaching. This was a time to focus on her family and support her husband's work in the church by playing for services and directing the choir. As a family, music was always a part of all they did at the churches they served. Anoka Covenant Church, 1957 to 1961. Redeemer Covenant Church, Chicago, 1961 to 1965. Bemidji Covenant Church 1965 to 1973. Edina Covenant Church 1973 to 1981. Elim Mission, Cokato 1981 to 1986. The last church Ben served before retiring in 1994 was Crosstown Covenant Church, Minneapolis.

While faithfully serving alongside her husband in ministry, Joan continued sharing her love of music with students as a music educator. She taught general music in Bemidji Junior High until 1973. During the years in Bemidji, she also directed a vibrant Teen Choir program at the Covenant Church. After moving to Edina in 1973, she taught in the Minnetonka Schools until her retirement in 1994. She often talked with great memories of the Minnetonka High School choirs, ensembles and musicals, which were her greatest years of teaching. Joan was the first woman to direct a senior high choral program in the Lake Conference of suburban Minneapolis schools.

After their retirements in 1994, Joan and Ben began construction of a new home in Ely on the shore of Burntside Lake. Joan and her childhood family had vacationed on this lake starting in 1937. She and her brother, Jim, claimed many times as youths that they would have homes on the lake one day. This became a reality as Ben and Joan built a beautiful home where family would gather and spend special times together. During the years in Ely they enjoy being full participants at LedgeRock Baptist Church. Joan continued teaching the weekly woman's Bible study until the spring of 2023. Even though music was a passion, leading people deeper into understanding scripture and an understanding of God's love in Christ was just as important.

Joan and Ben both loved to travel and experience new places and people.

In the fall of 2024, as winter approached, it became evident that living at the end of a trail was becoming more difficult. In July of 2025, Joan made the move to Eventide, Sheyenne Crossings assisted living center in West Fargo, ND. Because of further declines in health, in early February of this year she was moved to Eventide in Moorhead, MN for hospice care.

During her last days, while a granddaughter was sitting bedside and looking through Joan's Bible, she came across her life verse that had been noted and underlined. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

Joan had a deep love for her family and friends. She is survived by her sons and their families: Jonathan (Suzanne) Larson, children Jennie (Joshua) Dahl, James (Brittany) Larson and daughter-in-law Elizabeth Larson; Richard (Carol) Larson, children Matthew (Paula) Larson, Peter (Whitney) Larson, Michael (Carrisa) Larson; Steven (Sara) Larson, children Emily (James) Caro, Elliotte (Daniel) Walter, Danielle (Christopher) Baillargeon. Joan has 26 great-grandchildren. Her brother Richard (Carolee) Baxter. Many nieces and nephews.

Joan is preceded in death by her loving and committed husband of 59 years Rev. Benjamin L. Larson, parents Rev. James & Helen Baxter, siblings Grace Ann, James and Eva Mae, and grandson Andrew Larson.

In lieu of flowers, please direct memorials to the Scandinavian Christian Church Building Restoration Fund, C/O Paul Meyer – Treasurer, 11413 Halstead Trail, Woodbury, MN 55129. Also, Anoka Covenant, Bemidji Covenant, Crosstown Covenant Churches, or LedgeRock Baptist Church in

Ely.

Arrangements are with the West Funeral Home & Life Tribute Center, West Fargo & Casselton, ND. Local assistance provided by Schuller Family Funeral Homes & Cremation Services.

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on

Cemetery Details

Scandinavian Christian Cemetery (aka: Compton Mission Cem.)

29487 610th Ave. (from Wadena go W. on
Hwy 29, turn S on 610th Ave.)
Deer Creek, MN 56527

Previous Events

Gathering of Family & Friends

JUN 13. 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

Wadena Alliance Church
1428 Jefferson St. S.
Wadena, MN 56482

Celebration of Life

JUN 13. 2:00 PM (CT)

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