



Dr. Joe Graham Emerson

October 30, 1931 - January 9, 2026

Dr. Joe G. Emerson died peacefully on January 9, 2026, in Bloomington, Indiana. Born on October 30, 1931, Joe was raised in Evansville and graduated from Bosse High School and the University of Evansville. He received his Master of Divinity from Boston University School of Theology. Joe's forty year career in the ministry was spent serving United Methodist churches in Connersville, Bloomington, Columbus and Carmel. He retired to Bloomington in 1995.

In every community in which he lived and well into retirement, Joe was involved in social justice issues. As a young minister, he marched in Selma. He helped to integrate public schools in Connersville, worked to found Volunteers in Medicine in Columbus, served on the Board of Global Ministries and various Human Rights Commissions and was integral in establishing Shalom (now part of Beacon) in Bloomington. He received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from DePauw University.

In retirement, Joe enjoyed annual canoe trips with his grandchildren, gardening, reading, volunteering and Indiana University sports.

Joe is survived by Gloria, his wife of 71 years, his daughter Beth (Steve) Mrkvicka and his grandchildren Sam (fiancé Karina) and Emma. He was preceded in death by his parents, brother and son, Mark.

Joe lived a life defined by faith, service, love of family and hard work. To honor Joe's memory contributions may be made to The Beacon Emerson Endowment Fund through the Community Foundation of Bloomington & Monroe County: https://cfbmc.fcsuite.com/erp/donate/create/fund?funit_id=11

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Tribute Wall

LM

“Gloria, I am glad that you have had so many years with Joe. Of course, never enough. I feel that I have known him all my life, same high school, same college, same seminary, often appointments in the same district. And a good friend. The church and society will miss his leadership. He was one of the best superintendents as well as outstanding preacher. Your support, love, and ideas are an important part of Joe's success, as well. (Even your thought of swinging from the living room chandelier.)
Leslie McKown



Leslie McKown - January 22 at 01:24 PM

JD

“My condolences to Gloria and family. My family attended Carmel United Methodist while Joe was the minister there, and he was beloved by so many. Joe left an imprint on those he crossed paths with, and there are two very distinct moments that have stuck with me over many years: First, a Christmas Eve sermon he gave one year at Carmel UMC that left the entire sanctuary in complete awe - you could nearly feel the quietness that ensued. Joe was indeed a gifted story teller who taught lessons in a profound way. Second - his counsel to me when my father was dying. I called on Joe for support knowing how deeply touched my father had been by their friendship. It only made sense to me to lean on Joe as I prepared for the loss of my father, and I was touched by his kindness. Rest in peace Joe, thank you for your many gifts.

Joy D - January 14 at 09:03 PM

BO

“ Dr. Emerson will always be a special person to me and my family. When he was at Carmel United Methodist Church, he married my husband and I and baptized all 4 of our children. His sermons were so thoughtful and really challenged you to take action. The world is a better place because he was here. God bless you Joe.

Betsy Onofrey - January 13 at 07:31 PM

CC

“ A treasured life has completed its circle, leaving us all with memories and gratitude. Joe helped lead us through the joys and tragedies of life; His prayers when 5 music students died helped so much, as did his prayer when sweet Andy Upper died. His sermons made us think and his humour made us laugh. I think its fair to say many of us leaned on his words. Joe was much more and did much more than his humble obituary, but we know, many of us know how much he did and how much he meant to so may people. To Gloria and Joe's family, we send our thanks for sharing him with others and now it is time to send our condolences to you as you mourn....we mourn with you.

Carol and James Campbell - January 12 at 12:38 PM

BR

“ Gloria - you and Joe were woven into the fabric of my life since the beginning. I remember growing up watching the friendship between you, Joe, Howard, Joan, and my beloved grandparents: the tailgating at IU, the lives of service to others, and the love and laughter shared between the six of you are memories running along the timeline of my life. Listening to Joe speak always felt like an honor. I am sure there are many who share that sentiment with me. What an amazing human being. Sending love to you and your loved ones.

Bronwyn - January 11 at 08:33 AM

LD

“ Joe and Gloria had a deep friendship with my parents. Tailgating before IU football games, lovely parties, deep and energetic conversations over many years solidified a long and lasting relationship. A gift to humanity. Lucinda David

Lucinda David - January 11 at 08:09 AM