



Gary LeRoy Johnson

August 19, 1938 - December 4, 2024

Gary began life on August 19, 1938, as the second son born to Morry and Bettye Johnson. He grew up in south Minneapolis, where his father owned Sunlight Meat Market at the corner of 34th and Chicago Avenue. Gary and his older brother, Fred, often helped out in the shop and made deliveries for their father, navigating the Powderhorn Park neighborhood on their bikes. Two more siblings, Sharon and David, rounded out their busy family of six. In 1945, Morry and Bettye felt the Lord was calling them to full-time ministry, and they became one of the founding families of Bethany Fellowship, where Morry served as Vice President, a position Gary would hold several decades later. The Johnsons moved to the Bethany campus in Bloomington, and Gary went on to graduate from Bloomington High School in 1956 and then attend Bethany Missionary Training Center.

Music was a central passion of Gary's life, and following graduation from Bethany, he studied music at Augsburg College, an education that served him well when he was asked to lead the choir at Bethany Church. In 1959, Gary met Carol Schisler, a young woman from California who had grown up in the jungles of Borneo with her missionary parents. Her zest for life and boundless creativity, along with his thoughtful, curious approach to life was truly a match made in Heaven. Married in 1962, they joined the Bethany Fellowship staff and began singing Gary's songs at churches around the Twin Cities and beyond. Three albums, countless performances, and annual Christmas choir

concerts that drew thousands to Bethany Church marked a distinguished musical career.

Besides music, Gary's other passion was sharing the good news of the gospel through books. In his mid-twenties, Gary started what would become Bethany House Publishers and an enduring legacy of thousands of book titles and multiplied millions of books, including Leonard Ravenhill's *Why Revival Tarries* and Larry Christenson's *The Christian Family* to the visionary introduction of Janette Oke's *Love Comes Softly* and Leith Anderson's *Dying for Change*. By 1980, Carol had left her position as librarian and joined the editorial staff at Bethany House, and the two of them left an indelible mark on the Christian publishing industry, with books published in over 60 languages. From humble beginnings to numerous industry awards, including ECPA's Christian Book Awards, Gold Medallion Awards, and Gold and Platinum Awards, Gary and Carol's commitment to excellence never wavered.

In 2008, Gary retired from the publishing industry to focus more on family, including their two daughters, Deb and Barb, their six grandchildren, and soon four great-grandchildren. Gary and Carol's retirement years were spent enjoying long vacations, time at their cabin, and the grandparent circuit of track meets, dance recitals, gymnastics, and more. Some things never changed, though, and each morning would find Gary with a cup of coffee in one hand and his Bible in the other. He was a man of many talents—a sharp businessman, a gifted composer and musician, and a quiet mentor to many—but he is remembered most as a husband, father, grandfather, and friend whose faith, kindness, and joy will continue to shine through the lives he touched.

Gary passed away on December 4, surrounded by loved ones. The family would like to extend heartfelt thanks to the staff at McKenna Crossing, Prior Lake, for their care and support during Gary's final days.

A memorial service will be held on Monday, December 16 at 11:00 a.m. at Bethany Church, 6900 Auto Club Road, Bloomington. Visitation will be one hour prior to the service. Memorial gifts in Gary's name can be directed to: Bethany International, 6820 Auto Club Road, Suite J, Bloomington, MN 55438. Or online: <https://give.bethanyinternational.org/GaryJohnsonMemorial>

Cemetery Details

Bloomington Cemetery

10340 Lyndale Ave S
Bloomington, MN 55420

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 16. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Bethany Church
6900 Auto Club Road
Bloomington, MN 55438

Church Service

DEC 16. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Bethany Church
6900 Auto Club Road
Bloomington, MN 55438

Tribute Wall

WH

“ Gary was not a man of empty words. He was very observant of people and situations. He could make some hilarious plays on words. He did so well putting into words the truths and emotions of our faith.

Willy Harder and I (Joan Linder McLeod Harder) were in the same Bible school class with Gary at Bethany College of Missions. Of that class of 1959, five went to Brazil shortly after graduation. Among them were Roger Schrage, Jim Clower and Rich Craven, plus us. I think we all missed Gary and Carol's wedding and the early days with their children. We sometimes first saw the kids pictured in the new song books they published.

We were unable to attend the memorial Service in Minneapolis, so Willy and I decided to do something unique to remember Gary. We have the CD "Reminders of His goodness" from the 80's. What amazing thoughts were put to song for meditation and prayer. So we took the CD with us to the beach, 15 miles away, along the Gulf Coast of Mexico in Florida, found some big shade trees where we parked and then shared memories of Gary through the years. The waves had such a refreshing effect: a rhythmic, swishing of the incoming tide. The sea birds were skittering along the shoreline. With the windows open, we put the music up a couple notches so others might also hear. It seemed the horizon melted into eternity. Yes, they were God moments!! It was such a special time to remember Gary and give thanks for the great legacy he and Carol are leaving their children and all of us, really.

Our prayers are with you, Carol, and the family in your loss. We love you.

Willy and Joan Linder Harder - December 16, 2024 at 06:35 PM

WG

“ With love, Carlton and Jennifer Garborg planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Gary LeRoy Johnson.

With love, Carlton and Jennifer Garborg - December 13, 2024 at 09:29 PM

WG

“ With love, Carlton and Jennifer Garborg purchased the Fairest of All for the family of Gary LeRoy Johnson.



With love, Carlton and Jennifer Garborg - December 13, 2024 at 09:29 PM



“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Gary LeRoy Johnson.



December 13, 2024 at 04:51 PM



“ Blue Caribbean Bouquet was purchased for the family of Gary LeRoy Johnson.



December 11, 2024 at 03:01 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Gary LeRoy Johnson.*



December 10, 2024 at 08:18 AM