

Remembering

Willard Olsen

Born

October 17, 1932
Wanda, Minnesota

Died

August 2, 2023
Rapid City, South Dakota

Memorial Service

Friday, September 1, 2023
Atonement Lutheran Church
Rapid City, South Dakota

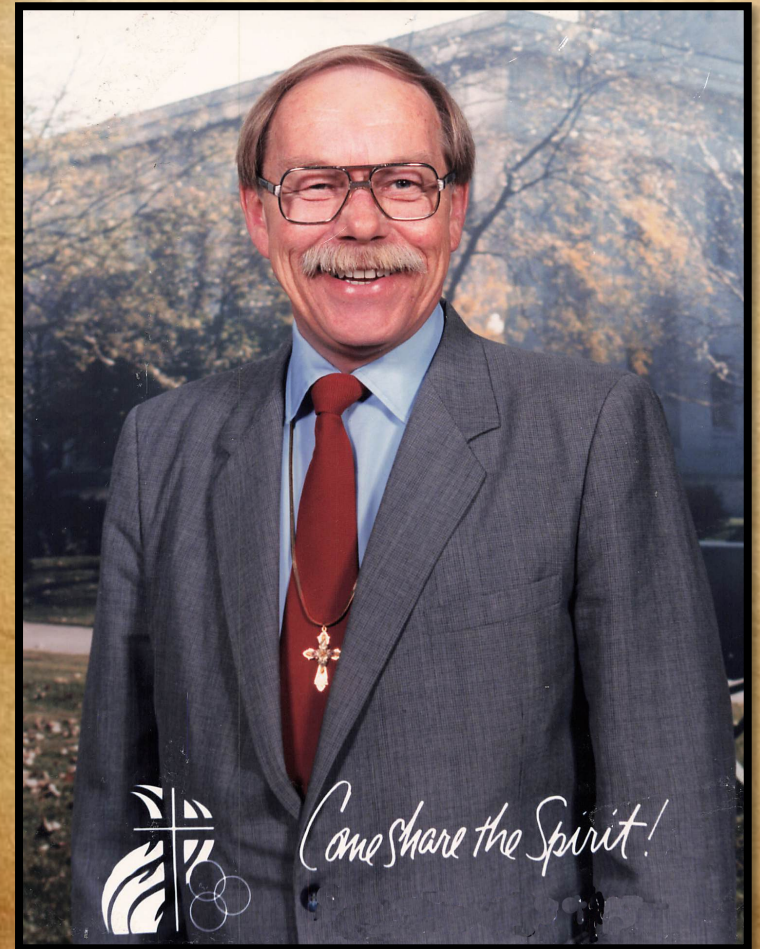
Officiants

Pastor Wilbur Holz
Pastor David Piper

*Committal Service, with Military Honors,
Will be at a later date*

Arrangements under the direction of
Kinkade Funeral Chapel
Sturgis, South Dakota

Remembering



Willard Olsen

October 17, 1932 ~ August 2, 2023

Willard Leonard Olsen, was born to Stanley and Amy (Dahl) Olsen, October 17, 1932, in Wanda, MN. He joined an older brother, Denny, who would become a lifelong best friend and comrade in many adventures and escapades.

Billy, Butch, Ole, Bill, and Will, were all monikers that were part and parcel of who he was and who he became. Each name marked periods of personal history, and each era of his life could be identified by them. Dad, Daddy, and Grandpa, were the names his family loved best.

His father worked as a telegraph operator for the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad, so his growing up years were “close to the tracks”, living in a number of small towns across Minnesota. Many of his favorite childhood memories were of Burr, MN, where the family moved on his fifth birthday. Known then as Billy or (“Farmer Burr” by his Grandpa Dahl) he attended the one room Burr School from 1st through the 5th grades. The 3 oldest Olsen kids, spent their childhood roaming the neighboring fields, “walking the tracks”, and riding the freight train to Canby, MN, to watch Saturday Matinees. Billy and his siblings were baptized at home by Pastor O.A. Olson from First English Lutheran Church of Canby, on July 11, 1943.

The family moved to Watertown, SD. After years of dirt paths and gravel roads, walking on real sidewalks took some getting used to! Here he acquired the nickname Butch, attended, and graduated high school. Many stories and fond memories were shared about those Watertown days, including the time when they lived above the freight house.

He participated in Boy Scouts, football and was the student manager of the high school basketball team. Church became a center for him. Confirmation in 1946 led to the first of five summers at Ne-So-Dak Bible Camp and an active role in Luther League, including a year as president and a trip to the International Lutheran Youth convention in Saskatoon, Canada with his lifelong friend, Rudy Griffen.

Following graduation from Watertown High School in 1950, Butch enlisted in the U.S. Navy as an electronics technician. He spent a year at Great Lakes and two years at the Ship Repair Facility in Yokosuka, Japan, during the Korean War. He was the shop expert on radar antenna repair because he was the only one who was not afraid to climb ships’ masts. A highlight of those years in Japan was climbing Mt. Fuji with his brother, Denny. It was in the Navy that he acquired the nickname, Ole.

Discharged in 1953, he worked at Scott Engineering Company designing and staking rural telephone lines. In 1954, he enrolled as an Electrical Engineering student at South Dakota State College, where he met and fell in love with Helen Smith from Sioux Falls, SD. They wed August 18, 1956, in the Sioux Falls College Chapel. Through the years, they were privileged to parent five wonderful children.

Ole’s vocational choice switched from engineering to becoming a Lutheran pastor. The couple moved to Minneapolis, MN, where Ole obtained a BA Degree in Speech and Theatre from Augsburg College in 1959. Ole accepted the call to be the Youth Director and Lay Assistant to the Pastor at Alpine Lutheran Church, Rockford, Illinois, before enrolling at Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN.

During his years in the seminary, he worked at Penn Avenue Lutheran as a Youth Director. He was ordained at Penn Avenue Lutheran Church, on June 20, 1965.

As in his early years when his family “followed the tracks”, Pastor Will, as he was now called, began what eventually became over 60 years of answering Christ’s call to ministry, serving the people of God in congregations in all corners of South Dakota, including: Waubay (SD) Lutheran Parish: Our Savior’s/ Egeland Lutheran Churches, 1965-1969. Trinity Lutheran Church, Mitchell, SD, 1969-1974.

St. John Lutheran Church Madison, SD, 1974-1982.

St. John’s Lutheran Church, Hot Springs, SD, 1982-1987

Piedmont Valley Lutheran Church in Piedmont, SD, 1987-1999.

Pastor Will loved the ministry of the Word and sacrament as well as sharing his ideas, leadership, support, and presence, on community, conference, and synod boards, and committees, Lutheran Social Services, Lutherans Outdoors, Piedmont Valley Library, and Community Action teams, among them.

While in Piedmont, he and Helen purchased the home they would live in for the next 36 years. He “retired” December 31, 1999. They joined Atonement Lutheran Church, Rapid City, SD.

During his years of retirement, he served for 18 years as a VA Chaplain at Ft. Meade, provided pulpit supply to many different congregations and served as Interim Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Sturgis, Faith Lutheran, Rapid City, and St. James Lutheran Church, Belle Fourche.

Dad loved hunting and fishing trips, traipsing thru the fields and prairies with good friends from Waubay, his children, sons-in-law and grandchildren, seeking out pheasants, geese, duck, deer, and antelope, then sharing the many stories that always followed. An avid map collector, he carefully planned family camping and vacation trips, marking the maps for the journey well in advance. You would never get lost if you followed his directions, and if you did, then you weren’t paying attention! Ole never passed up a game of cribbage, or a good book, he was a voracious reader (sometimes 2 or 3 books going at a time) and could often be found late at night reading a murder mystery with a glass of good scotch. He was immensely pleased and proud of his children, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, often showing pictures and recounting their accomplishments (and exploits) whenever he could bend an ear.

In January of 2023, he was diagnosed with cancer and was able to spend the next seven months at home with his wife, Helen. In his final days, he prayed that he was as much of a blessing to the people he served as he was blessed by all of them.

Surrounded by family, he passed away August 2nd at Monument Health Hospice House, Rapid City SD.

He is survived by, Helen, his wife of 67 years; his children, Per Olsen, Amy (Ron) Linn, Kristin (Tom) Hooker, Birgit (Shawn) Kelly, and Jon Olsen; grandchildren: Rebecca (Karl) Breddin, Bryan (Megan) Linn, Emily (Jarrod) Buresh, Winter (Aaron) Linn, Tillie (Jordan) Hooker, Molly (Luke) Kelly, Max (Emma) Hooker, Zoe (Josh) Harein, Lydia (John) Hooker Freeman, Sophia Hooker, Echo Olsen, and Crystal Olsen; great-grandchildren: Xavier, Lydia, and Tobin Breddin, Olivia and Jackson Buresh, Willow Duncan, Aspen, and Rowan Fiedler, Trey, Garrett, and Lauren Linn, and Hunter Davis; sisters: Jeri (Joe) Rodrick, Judy (Richard) Anderson, Pixy Russell, Amy (Mel) Verly, and Nancy (Brian) Peltier; sister in law, Eleanor Howard; and brother in law, Arthur Smith.

He was preceded in death by his Parents, Stanley and Amy Olsen, brothers Dennis Olsen, infant brother, Stanley Olsen, and infant sister, June Olsen.

Memorials preferred to: Lutheran Social Services, Lutherans Outdoors, Atonement Lutheran Church, Rapid City, SD, Augsburg College (Minneapolis MN) or Luther Seminary (St. Paul, MN).

Condolences may be sent to the family at www.kinkadefunerals.com.

***The family invites you to join them for fellowship and lunch
in the church hall, following the service.
Thank you for your presence and condolences.***