



Rev. J. Alan McLean

May 3, 1933 - April 28, 2024

Reverend Joseph Alan McLean, a retired United Church of Christ minister who served churches in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, passed away peacefully on Sunday evening, April 28, 2024. He spent his final weekend in New London, New Hampshire, surrounded by his children, his grandchildren, his one great grandchild, and many others. Alan died from cancer and congestive heart failure. He was 90, and just days shy of his 91st birthday. He was a resident of Covenant Village in Cromwell, Connecticut.

Reverend McLean – known to most as Alan or Al and by his grandchildren as Boppie - is being remembered by family and friends for his infectious laughter and consistent good humor; his strong example as a compassionate leader who was deeply committed to social justice and equality; his keen and sincere interest in everyone from his closest colleagues, friends, and family to acquaintances, home care workers, and retirement community staff; and, perhaps most of all, his enthusiastic and generously shared hugs.

Alan McLean was born on May 3, 1933, in Ayer, MA. He was the oldest of four children born to Caroline Hopkins McLean and Joseph McLean, a family doctor and Ob/Gyn in Ayer.

Raised in Ayer during World War II, Alan attended The Groton School, graduating in 1951. He played football and baseball at Groton. His senior year football team finished the season undefeated. That team later was inducted into the Groton Hall of Fame.

Alan graduated from Amherst College in 1955. He played football and

baseball in college and competed in cross country and downhill skiing. His junior year football team at Amherst also enjoyed an undefeated season. Alan majored in pre-med at Amherst and earned acceptance into the medical school at Tufts University. Coming from a family of doctors (and with two younger brothers who would go on to become doctors), admission into medical school was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Or it could have been. Instead, Alan was unsettled by his hard-won achievement. Thayer Green, the Amherst College Chaplain who would become a lifelong friend and mentor, finally asked, "What are you fighting, Al? What are you fighting?"

When Alan answered that pivotal question, he enrolled not in medical school but at Yale Divinity School to begin a lifetime of Christian ministry and service, graduating in 1959. Later in life, he would connect his career choice to his family of physicians, saying that "the parish minister today is the last general practitioner left."

During divinity school, he served for one year in Amherst, MA, as an assistant minister and Amherst College Chaplain. In 1957, he spent an inspiring but difficult summer doing field work in the East Harlem Protestant Parish, where he worked closely with New York City youth in an experience that he often described as eye-opening and transformational for his career.

He ran into Joan Marshall in 1956 on a train in France, where Alan was on a mission work trip and Joan was traveling with the Smith College Chamber Singers. They married on August 16, 1958, at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Wellesley, MA. Alan and Joan would spend the rest of their lives together as partners in his ministry, sharing their love of music, and raising a family.

Alan served from 1959 to 1964 at Pilgrim Memorial Church in Pittsfield, MA, where his two oldest children, Marshall and Kathy, were born. The young minister was asked to establish a "Northern" chapter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s civil rights organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Alan did so, and in the week after Easter 1964, he traveled to Williamston, NC, with a Black friend who was in the Berkshire County NAACP. They first underwent training in peaceful and

nonviolent civil disobedience. They then joined an integrated group of five who asked to be served lunch in a restaurant. They were denied service, and when they declined to leave, they were arrested and spent three days in jail. At a press conference after his return to Pittsfield, Alan described his role with characteristic humility: “What we have done is of relative insignificance ... but what we have been a part of is a movement of unusual significance.”

His actions in support of civil rights in the early '60s were controversial at the time and criticized by many, including other Massachusetts ministers and members of his congregation, his community, and his own family. Alan, though, was always proud that he received the full support of his father, who had been raised in segregated North Carolina. Alan described his dad, who also supported his decision to choose the ministry over medicine, as “the inspiration for my life.”

Alan served as Co-Pastor of South Congregational Church, UCC, in New Britain, CT, from 1964 to 1973, where he worked with long-time friend and colleague Hugh Penny. Children Amy and David joined the family during this time. The McLean Family would remain in their home on Shuttle Meadow Avenue in New Britain for over 40 years. Alan could be found on most spring and summer Saturday afternoons – after his sermon was finished – gardening in the backyard while listening to his beloved (if exasperating) Red Sox on his transistor radio.

He earned a Masters in Sacred Theology from Hartford Seminary in 1970, focused on Urban Ethics. The title of his graduate school thesis again left no doubt as to his professional priorities: “Parish Minister: One Third/Two Thirds – ‘A proposal for the restructuring of the ministry of the parish church in the direction of mission to urban community.’”

From 1973 to 1978, Reverend McLean became the Secretary of Evangelism for the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, a national role that required him to commute weekly to New York City and to travel frequently throughout the United States. Alan once explained his perspective on his

Homeland Ministries work: “Deed-in-word, word-in-deed. In this amalgam is a distinctiveness of discipleship that restores wholeness to both personal and public brokenness ... People are still amazed when deeds of justice and mercy fuse with words of testimony to the living Christ.”

Reverend McLean was called to The First Church of Christ in Hartford, CT, where he served from 1978 to 1998. He was the 22nd minister in the church first founded in 1636 by Thomas Hooker, who had broken away from Puritan leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Alan organized a 350th anniversary walk with parishioners from Boston to Hartford to commemorate the church’s early founding. Alan also served on the Board of Trustees of Hartford Seminary, the Board of the Bushnell Park Foundation, and the Board of First Night Hartford, and was a Rotary Club member.

At Center Church, as it is known, Reverend McLean continued his focus on equality and social justice. Well before the idea enjoyed broad acceptance, Alan embraced and advanced the Open and Affirming church movement that opened the church to and respected all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender differences. He also continued his commitment to racial, ethnic, and socio-economic justice and what he termed “the invisible but present poor [who] are still very much with us.” In 1982, when the KKK scheduled a rally in Meriden, CT, Alan hosted a peaceful counter-rally at Center Church that attracted an overflow crowd of over 1,000 people. This “Unity Day” was sponsored by the Anti-Racism Coalition of Connecticut, for which Alan played a crucial role, and attracted actor Paul Newman and Congressman Toby Moffett. His Sunday sermons were well researched, thoughtful, and relevant to the issues of the day, which is not surprising since, according to his family, he approached the weekly task as if he were writing a college term paper.

Alan “retired” in 1998 at the age of 65, which meant that he taught multiple courses at Hartford Seminary from 1998 to 2006. In 2000, he was one of 22 protesters arrested in Hartford while supporting Avery Heights retirement community District 1199 union workers seeking better working conditions and

higher pay.

New Hampshire held a special place in Alan McLean's heart. He visited the state every year of his 90-year life. His parents and relatives owned modest summer cottages on Pikes Point at Newfound Lake. He spent every summer there as a child. As a teenager and young adult, he worked at several summer camps, most prominently at the Groton School Camp on Mayhew Island in Newfound Lake, a camp that served "needy boys from New England's urban areas". He played alongside brothers, relatives, and friends for the Bristol, NH, town summer baseball team in high school and college. After games and on special gatherings for the rest of their lives, this group would join to sing entertaining and familiar a cappella harmonies from a bygone era.

His wife Joan's family, the Marshalls, owned an 1813 farmhouse and barn at the end of a dirt road in New London, NH. Alan and his family spent every August there for many years from the 1970s onward. From 2002 to 2010, Alan and Joan lived in the New London home year-round, a time that he often described as the most joyous of his life. He fished, hiked, skied, sang in the choir with Joan, and ... Alan being Alan ... he worked. From 2004 to 2010, he served as Adjunct Pastor for First Baptist Church in New London, where he supported Jeff Zurheide, a minister and friend who was battling cancer. He also enjoyed working alongside his dear friend, Cindy Johnson, the church's Youth Minister. Alan was a long-time member of the New London Rotary. Family members during this time learned not to accompany Alan into town on an errand unless they weren't in a hurry, as he would stop and talk with almost everyone he encountered.

Near the end of 2010, Alan and Joan entered the next and most difficult phase of their life together, as Joan was struggling through a more-than-decade-long fight against Alzheimer's. Alan served as her primary caregiver during this entire time, giving her his full attention and devotion until Joan passed away in February 2021. In 2010, when Joan could no longer live in New Hampshire, the couple moved to the Covenant Village Retirement Community in Cromwell, CT, where Alan developed a vibrant new community of friends. He

was active in current events discussions, the village newsletter, musical groups, quiet ministry to other residents, advocacy to management, and most everything else going on in the community.

The McLean Family owes a special debt of gratitude to the entire team at Home Instead, a home care group in Middletown, CT, who faithfully worked with Alan to care for Joan over many years and then cared for Alan in his final days. The Home Instead team became part of Alan's extended family, and he developed close friendships with the owners and many of the staff.

Over more than six decades, Alan participated in virtually every McLean or Marshall family wedding and funeral that occurred – and there were many. In 2012, he published “Milestones: 50 Plus Years with Family & Friends,” a family history where he compiled memories, sermons, and photos from those services. In 2023, he updated this family record with “The Second Mile: Ten More Years with Family & Friends.” Future family weddings and funerals may seem strange without Alan, but he will continue to lead through our memories of his example.

Alan's most enjoyable role, one for which he was ideally suited, was as “Boppie” to his seven grandchildren. Whether fishing, chatting on the phone, sharing a success or challenge, debating political issues, or singing and playing family games, Alan treasured his specific, meaningful, and individual relationships with each grandchild. For them, Boppie is irreplaceable.

Alan possessed what Rev. Cindy Johnson of New London, NH, has called the “silent strength of a faithful man.” He increased the joy of every happy moment, whether it be Christmas morning, a birthday, or just a chance meeting on the street. He did this not by drawing attention to himself, but by directing joy, happiness, and fellowship onto those around him through his laughter, hugs, and sincere interest in others. He possessed the strength of a mirror, reflecting good moments back and intensifying them. Alan also absorbed the pain and distress of others in difficult times and made suffering more bearable. In grief, separation, failures, and despair, Alan was the first

person to whom many would turn. He helped with words, yes, but more with his steady and empathetic presence. In these moments, Alan shared the quiet power of a magnet, connecting and holding others close for support and reassurance that they were not alone.

Alan's admirable personal qualities also animated his broader commitment to social justice and equality. When Cindy Johnson once asked about the strength of his ministry and conviction, Alan responded honestly and without pause: "Isn't that what Jesus's followers are supposed to do?" A humble man of great faith, Alan was a role model for believers and non-believers alike. The legacy of his life's ministry is that he excluded no one, and he seemed to enhance everyone and everything that he touched. May he, at long last, rest in peace.

Alan McLean is survived by his four children, Marshall (Alicia) of Concord, MA, Kathy (Jim) of New London, NH, Amy of Tariffville, CT, and David of New Britain, CT; seven grandchildren, Matthew (Ali), Laney, Tucker (Rebecca), Luke, Benjamin, Charlotte, and Rose; one great grandchild, Miro; several nieces and nephews; and a brother-in-law, Glenn Dorr of Concord, MA, and a sister-in-law, Ursula McLean of Media, PA. Alan was predeceased by his wife of 62 years, Joan, and two brothers, Dr. Marshall McLean and Dr. Robert McLean, and a sister, Anne (McLean) Dorr. A memorial service will be held on Saturday, June 1, at 11 a.m. at First Church of Christ (Center Church), 675 Main Street, Hartford, CT. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Alan's memory to the First Church of Christ and designated for the 1636 Heritage Project. Alan was deeply involved in this Project, which supports the church's mission and outreach in Hartford. Carlson Funeral Home, New Britain, is assisting the family with arrangements.

Cemetery Details

Private Location

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JUN 1. 11:00 AM (ET)

First Church of Christ (Center Church)
675 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06103

Tribute Wall

JR

“ I offer my sincere condolences and prayer. I am writing as I found a little book called, "God's Minute" a book of 365 daily prayers sixty seconds long for home worship. The inscription inside says, " Eugenia Graham Clark, Raleigh, NC and then Mrs. John Allan MacLean Jr. 26 Main St Greenwood, South Carolina. The names and address are hand written inside the cover that was copywritten in 1906. It's a small pocket book. I didn't know if this was something that had value to your family as I would be happy to mail it. cjnmrus sell@yahoo.com Again, my heart felt love and prayers are with you.
Jeri Russell



Jeri Russell - September 25, 2025 at 12:01 PM

RL

“ I'm so sorry to have missed this news. Alan had a profound influence on my life personally and professionally. He was truly a Christian, a good man, and a faithful friend!

Rev. Frank Lamson - December 25, 2024 at 11:58 AM

ST

“ I had the pleasure of meeting Alan and Joan in April 1987, when they brought David to an event at Northeastern University for prospective freshmen. I was David's academic advisor during his freshman year, and I communicated with Rev. McLean on several occasions. As is so often the case, we did not remain in contact over the years, but I remember the McLeans very well, and have always thought highly of them. My deepest condolences to David, Amy, Kathy and Marshall. May God be with you!

Steven Taylor

Steven J Taylor - September 09, 2024 at 08:28 PM

KC

“ I am saddened hear of Alan's death and offer my heartfelt condolences to his family. I attended Center Church in the 1990s when Alan was pastor and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know Alan and Joan.
In mid-January 2024, Alan gave one of the remembrances at a memorial service in Old Lyme for someone who unknown to me was a mutual acquaintance. After the service, I had the opportunity to chat with Alan and catch up over the many years that had passed. His warmth and vitality was as strong as ever, and it was a treat to spend time with him again, if only for a short while. Alan touched many lives in a positive way, and his memory is a blessing to me and to many others.

Kenneth J Carifa - May 31, 2024 at 09:42 AM

LT

“ Alan was the consummate pastor and a wonderful friend to us and our children.

In times of loss, he was there for us with a hand-written letter containing just the right words to give comfort and peace. He baptized Andrew and Julia (and let Edie baptize Catherine) and stepped in while in retirement to perform Catherine's wedding. Week in and week out, Alan guided us down the path of becoming better, more loving people, and for that we are eternally grateful. He also made it easy for us to get our children to come enthusiastically to church each week because they looked forward so much to stopping by his office to visit the well-stocked candy jar he kept on his desk!

It was a privilege for us to be in a small bible study group for 10 years that included Alan and Joan and met at our house, so we would not have to get a babysitter. Alan was not at all like a typical minister during these sessions—just someone who wanted to continue to grow in positive ways.

We will always remember Alan's warm embrace and wonderful smile, and the love and care he showed for Joan as her health declined. As usual, he continued to be a role model for us all.

We are only two of the many, many people who have been blessed over the years to have Alan be part of their lives. Thank you for sharing him with all of us. May God's peace be with you.

*With love and gratitude,
Alvin and Lesley Morgan Thompson*

Lesley Morgan Thompson - May 29, 2024 at 12:08 PM

SP

“ I loved Alan and Joan. He was a co-pastor with my dad. He was like another father, always kind, very thoughtful, offering wisdom along the way. I spent many days at their house, good memories. I wish you all peace in the following days.

shakeela penney - May 28, 2024 at 02:58 PM

MB

“ Alan and Joan were beloved friends of my parents', Harold and Joyce Buckingham. Alan was a huge support to my Dad when my Mom passed away unexpectedly just 5 months after Joan had died. Eleven months later, as our Dad was in the hospital dying Alan brought enormous comfort to our Dad, my brother, sister and me with his frequent visits, prayers and wise, faithful perspective. All this was during a time when a brother and another dear friend of Alan's were also in their final days here on earth. Just 2 months ago, Alan met me at Cedar Hill Cemetery at my parents' graveside when I came down from New Hampshire to work on estate settlement. Once again, his stories and prayers were joyful and comforting. His death comes as a shock - even though he was almost 91 years old. Alan is one of the most devout people I have ever known, always putting others needs before his own, and able to bring a message of peace whatever the situation. It has been a privilege to get to know him these past two years. The world has lost a giant disciple! I imagine there is a boisterous Hymn Sing going on in heaven right now, with Alan, Joan and my Mom and Dad - all lovers of music and singing. My deepest sympathies to his family, whom I know he loved deeply. Margaret Buckingham, Dover, NH

Margaret L Buckingham - May 05, 2024 at 04:02 PM

SD

“ He was a second father to me, always there when I needed him with a hug, smile and so happy to see me, just seeing him made me feel better. I will always be grateful for his friendship with my mother. I have so many memories but my most appreciative one is the day I delivered my son Jack, he had to be rushed to CCMC I had asked my mother to go with my baby .. She called Alan (without me knowing) he came straight NBGH and stayed with me all day, it meant everything to me to feel loved and cared for by him. He holds a special place in my heart... sending love and sympathy to his family.

Xo Susan Rohrbaugh DAfonso

Susan DAfonso - May 04, 2024 at 08:26 AM

SL

“ While I didn't know Alan for a long period of time, I had the opportunity to get to know him as a result of friendship with his daughter Amy. I was lucky to share many meals with him, and watch as Amy doted and he said, "I'm fine, dear." I can hear that. I enjoyed his perspectives, and his stories. Always poignant. Always with a lesson. And always with a laugh. He was certainly a bright light. Common condolence would be to acknowledge some sort of rest...but anyone who knew Alan, knows that rest is not his thing. So, I'll say go in peace and love, and with the knowledge that you have made the world a better place.

Shannon Leary - May 03, 2024 at 10:38 PM

CP

“ Great neighbor and friend Claude Paquette Covenant

claude paquette - May 03, 2024 at 07:41 AM