



John Alfred Baxter

August 14, 1927 - May 28, 2020

Chaplain John A. Baxter, LCDR USNR, left us to report for duty along side Jesus Christ on May 28, 2020. During his 92 years he honorably served God and Country. His Naval military service started when he was only 17 years old, just at the end of WWII. His parents, Arthur and Marguerite Baxter, needed to provide written approval to the government because he was not yet 18.

His discharge document shows his decorations include: World War II Victory Medal, National Defense Services Medal (Korean conflict), Vietnam Campaign Medal and Vietnam Service Medal. He had two tours in Vietnam, one as the Chaplain for the Marine Corp in Chu Lai (AmTracs and Medical Battalion) and the second as the Chaplain on the USS Camden supply ship.

Joan, his loving wife of 64 years, and their three successful sons, Ken, Scott, and Sean survive him. Ken was born in the Naval Hospital in Rhode Island; three years later Scott was born in Connecticut; and six years after that Sean was born in California. Over time the entire family migrated to North Carolina and have lived within an hour of Mooresville for the past 17 years.

In addition to serving as a Navy reservist for decades, John graduated from Maryville College in Tennessee and later Princeton Theological Seminary and shepherded various Presbyterian churches during his pastoring career in: Lansing, TN; Lordsburg, NM; Stamford, CT; Spring Valley, CA; La Mirada, CA; Andover, NY; Pitman, NJ. Upon retiring from the Pitman, NJ church, he relocated to Lexington, VA and joined a group of retired ministers who “supply-preached” at small churches for the Shenandoah Presbytery.

John was a life-long learner and teacher. His interests were as varied as bee keeping, ceramics, wine making, farming, building and reading. In his youth he was an enthusiastic Boy Scout earning the Eagle Scout designation. He also loved music and in high school he played the trumpet, an instrument he still owned when he retired.

He never shied away from working with his hands, building houses for Habitat for Humanity in Pitman, NJ; maintaining bee hives in California, building boats in Lexington, Virginia and creating ceramic art with his wife and firing it in his own hand-built kiln.

John and Joan spent more than 15 years in the smog-choked air of southern California, and they worried that their boys would be adversely affected by the environment. Looking for a plot of land that could function as a self-sustaining small family farm, the family settled near Andover, NY, a village of 1,205 people.

Maybe the biggest “new thing” he tried was starting a small sheep farm that John and Joan called “Celebration Farm.” It was a place to celebrate God, life and learning. They hosted exchange students and they had youth groups visit from various churches. It was a place for learning based on Christian principles.

It is amazing how God works in one’s life. John and Joan had found a wonderful community where they could develop their little farm, teach their boys how to work with their hands, and be a “shepherd” to a hundred head of Rambouillet sheep on the hill overlooking Andover and tend to a flock of Presbyterians in the valley below.

From that little village, John and Joan were able to watch their family and flock of sheep grow. They watched the eldest son, Ken, graduate from SUNY Alfred, and that same day John officiated the marriage ceremony of Ken and Carol. They saw their second son, Scott, graduate both high School and SUNY Alfred and go off to serve in the Army. They raised their youngest son, Sean, on the farm and eventually saw him graduate in Pitman, NJ and go off to the Army.

John and Joan were guided by God to their final ministry in Pitman, NJ. As they said, it was a pairing made in heaven. They loved the congregation, the church and the town and it was a homecoming, of sort, in that they finally returned to their birth state of New Jersey.

John’s passion for his work and approach to his ministry led to Princeton Seminary selecting his Pitman, NJ church as a Teaching Church where students at the end of their academic career would go to get real world experience working with John and his parishioners. It was very rewarding to help teach and shape the next generation of Presbyterian ministers.

In addition, the Pitman congregation enthusiastically engaged in building and remodeling homes for Habitat for Humanity, a real passion of John’s.

The Pitman congregation really embraced John and Joan as their new minister and “first lady” and the final ten years of their ministry was filled with love and wonderful people that became life-long friends. It is probably every minister’s dream to have such a loving and caring church to finish their career.

The thing to remember is John lived what he preached. Everything flowed from the most important Commandment: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is Love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27, Mark 12:29-31, Matthew 22:37-39)

John was blessed with caring support at home until his departure from this life. The entire family is grateful to many, with special thanks to: Hospice and Palliative Care of Iredell County

Adriana Vermillion and Scott Baxter for 24/7 caretaking Home Instead caregivers
Reverend Susan Harrison for being God’s shepherd to shepherd John In lieu of flowers, you may consider financial support for: HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE OF IREDELL COUNTY 2347 SIMONTON ROAD STATESVILLE, NC 28625.

A virtual memorial service will be held on Friday, August 14, 2020 from 11:00-12:00am . Details and a link to watch the service live will be posted on www.cavin-cook.com/obituaries Please post your own comments, stories and photos on the Tribute Wall.

For those who are unable to attend the service, you may go to the following link for the live stream

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iKoTj2AVuM

To view military honors, you may go to the following link for the live stream

<https://www.facebook.com/CavinCookFuneralHomeServices/>

Cemetery

Events

Cavin-Cook FH & Crematory

494 E. Plaza Drive

Mooresville, NC, 28115

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Memorial Service

11:00AM - 12:00PM

Cavin-Cook Chapel

494 E. Plaza Drive, Mooresville, NC, US, 28115

Comments



“ 3 files added to the album Memories Album



Michael Roberts - August 14 at 12:49 PM



“ From Caroline Edmondson (Lyon)

John Baxter was not only family but he was also a friend to my parents. His wife Joan is my dad's cousin and very dear to us! I can remember so many gatherings from the time I was little. One special memory I have involves my daughter Catherine. She had a favorite yellow blanket. When we would see John she would run straight to him and he would pretend to take it. They would play tug of war for the rest of the evening! It was a game they played every time we saw him!

Ken Baxter - August 14 at 12:08 AM



“ When I spoke with my mother, Harriet "Bonnie" Baxter, wife of John's younger brother, David (who passed in 2005), she said she was so grateful that John was able to get an emergency leave from the Navy to come and officiate at my parents wedding. Although there were some doubters about how long the marriage would last, "Uncle John" promised them a 50 year guarantee if they get their money back. To this day my mother jokingly expresses her dismay that John's guarantee did not hold; they only had 49 1/2 years together before Dad passed away. She assured me that she forgives me father for not making it to 50, and she did not see to collect from John on his guarantee since they enjoyed do many good years together.

Another thing my mother mentioned, and that I will second, is that we regret that we did not spend more time together with the extended Baxter clan.

I, for one, was hoping that John would write an autobiography - what a life! I would really like to have know him better.

He rests now, awaiting the Resurrection, and the call of Christ, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

John Mathews Baxter, second son of David and Harriet Baxter, nephew of John and Joan.

John Baxter - August 13 at 09:34 PM



“ John Baxter was the only Grandfather I lived to know and love. I do wish I got to be with him more, but I do not regret any of the times I was there. He was very kind and loving to everyone. I would like to make him proud by doing the same, even while he is with the Lord in Heaven.

Jonathan Baxter - August 12 at 01:51 PM



“ My deepest condolences to Joan and family. I have known them many years and finer people than them are hard to come by. I am saddened but also know he is with his Heavenly Father!

Dixie Christensen - June 02 at 11:40 AM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Terry McDonald - June 01 at 09:11 AM



“ During our visit to the Baxter homestead in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley we toured the local sights and enjoyed John and Joan's beautiful home and boatbuilding shop. It seemed the perfect retirement situation well earned through decades of hard work and saving. I am glad that John and Joan got to enjoy it. I only wish they could have enjoyed it longer.

Terry - June 01 at 09:14 AM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Terry McDonald - June 01 at 09:04 AM



“ One of many dinners at our house in Pitman NJ. John and Joan introduced us to Don and Judy Brown. Suz and I are standing. Don has also passed away. Two of the finest men I have known, leaving behind two of the finest women I have known. Our lives have been so enriched by the company of these wonderful people.

Terry - June 01 at 09:09 AM



“ John and Joan are two of the finest human beings we ever had the privilege of knowing. John worked so hard on his sermons and always stimulated me to think deeply about the insights he provided. He also was always open to differing points of view over dinner at our house. I watched him work with very difficult members of the congregation with patience and professionalism, I would never have been able to muster. His excellence as a pastor is only surpassed by his excellence as a husband, father and friend. He will forever be remembered and loved and forever missed.

Terry McDonald - June 01 at 08:06 AM