



## **Remembering John Gingrich, Dean Emeritus at the University of La Verne**

John H. Gingrich, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Religion and Philosophy at the University of La Verne, died peacefully in his sleep on Tuesday, December 8, 2020, at the age of 79.

John was born in New Holland, Pennsylvania to John and Miriam Gingrich. The second of 4 siblings, he was raised in the Church of the Brethren community and appreciated the values and commitment to service instilled during his upbringing. He met Jacqueline “Jacki” Graber during his first week at Manchester College in Indiana, and married her the first weekend after their graduation in 1963. They enjoyed 57 years together raising their sons, John and Joel, pursuing their careers, and traveling the world.

John had a passion for sports, playing soccer, basketball, and tennis in high school and college, and later serving as a coach for his son’s teams

and for the University of La Verne men's soccer team. John enjoyed competing with friends and family in tennis, ping pong, basketball, and handball, and delighted in watching his sons and grandsons play sports.

John was also a lover of music – playing, singing, and listening to music were a constant in his life. John started singing with his family at church, was a member of the college A Capella choir, and continued singing his whole life including 16 years as a professional member of the Los Angeles Master Chorale and the Roger Wagner Chorale. While performing with the latter group at Nixon's inauguration in 1973, people mistook him for Van Cliburn (also on the program) and asked him for autographs. John obliged, but signed his own name!

John was privileged to sing all around the world at venues ranging from local churches to Dodger Stadium, Carnegie Hall, and the Caesarea Amphitheatre in Israel. He shared his musical passion and gifts with his son Joel and cherished the opportunities they had to sing together in both church and college choirs. Joel reflects that "Singing with my dad is one of my fondest memories. We shared the same vocal tone, so when we stood together and sang the same note, we sounded as if we were one voice."

John was also fascinated by Joel's skill in playing English handbells with various groups and performing handbell solos.

John's distinguished academic career started with his earning a B.A. degree from Manchester College, followed by a M.Div. at Bethany Theological Seminary, and culminating with his Ph.D. at Claremont Graduate University. John was a lifelong learner and naturally curious about new ideas and perspectives which kept him connected to his local community as well as the broader world.

Perhaps best known for his 37 years spent at the University of La Verne, John's legacy stems from being an integral part of the ULV fabric, bringing together the administration, faculty, staff, and students to further the shared mission of making the ULV experience a special one. He began his career as Campus Minister in 1968, and then served as Department Chair and Division Chair, as well as Professor of Religion and Philosophy. John eventually attained the position of Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a position he held from 1987 through 2004, retiring from the faculty in 2005. Throughout his years at ULV, John also held positions as Director of the Brethren Colleges Abroad program (Philipps Universität,

Marburg, Germany), the National Advisory Board for the School of Theology at Claremont, and the Board of Trustees at Bethany Theological Seminary.

Steve Morgan, the President Emeritus of the University of La Verne affirmed, "What I appreciated most was John's commitment to his values of inclusivity, mutual respect, and the need to protect our planet." He went on to say, "John was an insightful and collaborative administrator and an engaging and caring professor, father, friend, and church leader who encouraged all of us to thoughtfully expand our own horizons. John always encouraged us to live our mission statement rather than putting it on the shelf." To further emphasize the importance of Dean Gingrich to the University of La Verne, Jonathan Reed, Provost, espouses Dr. Gingrich as "the heart and soul of the University (who) was a larger-than-life figure who helped transform the University."

Throughout his academic career and in his post-academic life, John was passionate about process theology. He was proud to have studied and earned his Ph.D. under his mentor, Dr. John Cobb, and most recently, honored to play a role in the formation of the Cobb Institute where he served as the first Chairperson. In keeping with John's interest in education, process theology conceptualized God not as omnipotent, but rather a force for the power of persuasion, recognizing that all life is interconnected and in the process of becoming. Dr. Cobb reminisced, "John Gingrich was a solid citizen, representing the best of the university, the best of the church, and the best of the nation in a time when all three are failing to live up to their potentials."

John and Jacki were both very active members of the Church of the Brethren in La Verne with John serving as Moderator and Board Chair for the church, as well as Board Chair for Hillcrest Retirement Community. An ordained minister, John performed weddings for numerous family and friends over the years, always taking time to understand what made each union special and incorporating that into the wedding ceremony. John (mostly) enjoyed the extensive traveling he and Jacki did over the years which included visiting 6 continents and approximately 60 countries as a way of connecting with and appreciating the wider world. They were delighted to share a grandparents/grandson trip with Gus (sailing in the Caribbean), and Hans (Alaskan cruise).

Despite John's far-reaching activities and community service, his family will tell you they always felt he was around and available for family dinners (most of which he cooked) as well as school activities or just a chat about life in general. Son John remembers, "My dad prioritized time spent together as a family and set a great example of being present. Whether as part of our tradition of grabbing pizza together after my high school football games or more recently in just catching up on work activities over the phone, I could always count on him to listen, ask insightful questions, and more often than not make a smart ass comment to bring some humor into the conversation." John's son-in-law Scott remembers him as a "monolith wrapped in a teddy bear" and will miss his quick wit and wisdom.

John is survived by his spouse Jacki; his sons John Gingrich (Christine Currie) of California and Joel Gingrich (Dr. Scott Helberg) of South Dakota; his sisters Adele (Dick) Pogue of Virginia, Eileen (Jim) Biser of New York, and Julia (Dale) Sollenberger of New York, and his grandsons Gus and Hans.

A virtual memorial service will premiere on Saturday, January 23, 2021 at 10:00 AM PST via YouTube. ([youtube.com/c/LaVerneChurchoftheBrethren/videos](https://www.youtube.com/c/LaVerneChurchoftheBrethren/videos)).

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made in John's name to the following organizations:

La Verne Church of the Brethren (<https://www.lavernecob.org>) under 'Give'/'Donate on PayPal' and select the 'John Gingrich Memorial Fund'  
University of La Verne (<https://laverne.edu/>) under 'Give to La Verne' and by entering 'John Gingrich' as the Honorees' name  
Cobb Institute (<https://cobb.institute/>) under 'Donate' and selecting the 'John Gingrich Memorial Fund'