

Rev. John E. Saxton *C.H.-R.*  
*8-24-2023*



Rev. John E. Saxton, 88, of Grinnell, Iowa, died on August 20, 2023. Born May 19, 1935 in Tilden, Neb., he was the son of Darrell and Margaret (Vogt) Saxton. John graduated from Tilden High School in 1953. He went on to attend West Mar College in LeMars, Iowa, before transferring to Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Ill., where he earned a degree in history in 1957.

John answered the call to ordained ministry, attending Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Penn., bucking the trend of "Elmhurst, Eden, Eternity." Upon his graduation in 1961, he returned to the prairie of northeast Nebraska and was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the United Church of Christ. He served a four-point charge (Immanuel, Peace, Theophilus, and Zion) for nine years before going back to school for additional training in pastoral care and counseling. He earned a master of sacred theology from Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. In 1971, John accepted the call to serve the United Church of Primghar in Primghar, Iowa, where he brought together two congregations (one UCC and the other UMC) and built a new church building.

While returning from sabbatical in 1981, he visited a seminary friend and family in Doylestown, Penn. It was during that visit where he met the woman he would eventually marry, Patricia "Pat" Hager. Pat knew he was the one because he could always make her laugh. John knew she was the one because she could always read his handwriting. Their long distance courtship consisted of many letters and phone calls. John and Pat were married at Pat's home church of Salem UCC in Doylestown, Penn., on June 25, 1982. Their wedding date of June 25 was chosen specifically as that was the anniversary of the formation of the United Church of Christ. They made their home in Primghar, where they welcomed their first child, son David, in June of 1983. After serving as an interim minister in Ionia-New Hampton and Waukon, Iowa, John, Pat, and David eventually settled in Gladbrook in 1986. A daughter, Caroline, arrived in November of that year. John served Peace UCC in Gladbrook, Iowa, for ten years before the family moved in 1997 to Hubbard, Iowa, where he served as pastor of Zion UCC. John retired from pastoral ministry in 2000 when they moved to Grinnell. He served as the chaplain at Mayflower Community until his retirement following Pat's death in October 2011.

John was very active in the local Grinnell community, supporting a variety of organizations with his time, talent, and treasure. Prior to the Covid pandemic, he was often seen attending events at Grinnell College and reading at the Drake Community Library. A member of Grinnell UCC, John supported the work of his local church as well as the wider church. He had been active in community mental health, CIRSI, Kiwanis, and Meals on Wheels.

He could have been an official spokesperson for the Keebler Company, based on his love for their club crackers.

John was a loving husband, a wonderful father, a good friend, and a faithful servant of the gospel. He believed in doing good and viewed life as being filled with possibilities and opportunities, a philosophy he passed along to his daughter.

John is survived by his children, son David of Ankeny, Iowa, and daughter Caroline of Chambersburg, Penn.; his sister Gretchen of Larkspur, Colo.; many nieces and nephews and their families; and many friends.

A memorial service celebrating John's life will be held at the Grinnell United Church of Christ, Saturday, September, 30, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. A visitation will be held at Smith Funeral Home, Friday, September 29, 2023, with the family present from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be designated to Grinnell UCC or to the Mayflower Community Human Needs Fund.