**A Good Word for Al Cremens
August 17, 2018**

 He was kind and gentle. And always a smile. He came from humble beginnings born in Kentucky, but for most of his life Charlotte has been home. His start in life was a bit tough, but through high school, then the Navy, then an engineering degree from NC State, Al Cremens gained confidence and strength as he began to maneuver life on his own. Through those formative years he grew into who he was meant to be all on his own. And then he met Betty. And all of a sudden, Al gained a big and loving family that absorbed him into the fabric of their lives and showed him how love could lead the way. And that’s how he led his life. With love leading the way. Betty ran the show, and Al liked it that way. She was the planner. He was more cautious. She loved the pomp and circumstance in all things. He was more simple. She liked beauty and being put together. He didn’t need much more than something to read and paper and pen to write. They both loved travel. And food. And music. And together they made a wonderful life. They were a great fit – she was always planning and doing and he was always saying “yes, dear.” He didn’t want or need accolades or trophies. He was simply real. And full of so much love and kindness and gentleness.

 But that is not to say that life was always easy. As I wrote in Betty’s eulogy 11 years ago, “Some folks have what seems like more than their share of hardships. It seems to me that that is part of Al and Betty’s story. But Betty, and as she called him, “Sonny,” weathered life’s storms together. Faithful. Strong. Full of strength and hope. For half a century. Yes, indeed, together they fought the good fight of life’s adversities and disappointments and griefs in ways that inspire us all.” They were a great match.

He loved his work as an architect. He liked the production side of things. It allowed for his creativity to flow. But he was safe. Not a risk taker. He never needed to be in charge. He just needed a place to do his craft - just steady and faithful and content working primarily in designing schools and hospitals. What a life. For what’s more rewarding than doing something you love and something that you are good at to create spaces for education and healing. It must have been very satisfying for Al. From humble beginnings to a very good life, Al Cremens had a lot to be proud of, but pride was not his thing. An avid reader and writer, Al loved the world in the ways that he read about it and wrote about it. And in the way that he related to people with his simple and easy-going goodness. But Al didn’t like to be alone. He was a bit lost without Betty, and so later in life he met Frances Welsh and her family, and he was received yet again into a large and loving family that welcomed him and gave him another chance at love and happiness and contentment for a good while. It dawned on me that so many people don’t find love and happiness even once, much less two times. But until the time came that Al needed to move into a place that could provide the kind of care he needed, he and Frances enjoyed one another’s company. They had their church in common and a loneliness that accompanies the death of one’s spouse. And late in life, they found happiness. And it was a gift. Many a beautiful afternoon, you might find Al and Frances sitting on the park bench just outside the sanctuary having walked the few blocks from the neighborhood behind the church to be in a setting that felt like home for each of them from another lifetime and another family. That’s one gift of church – bringing people together and making them feel like they are home.

Al’s role at Park Road was that of Sunday School teacher. You know that “old school” kind of Sunday School teacher that studied and prepared for class way in advance, that scheduled time out of town around Sundays so as to not miss teaching his class, that learned way more about each lesson than he could have possibly taught. We still have some of those kinds of teachers today, but more and more I’m convinced that they don’t make them like that anymore. Al took his job seriously and his class was the beneficiary of his diligence and faithfulness. Al’s dedication to teaching was only a part of his commitment to his faith and to his church. Church’s need more men like Al Cremens to fill those teaching roles. We need more folks like Al – gentle and kind and loving – to embody the Love of God and the Way of Jesus.

I’m sure that Al would say that his best work and his greatest accomplishments are his children and his grandchildren. Kim and Jeff, you were his pride and joy. He beamed when he spoke of you both. His love for you was evident. And even moreso, his pride and love for his grandchildren. It is so sad when one’s mind begins to fade in ways that help us to see less clearly. When memories fade and recollection is gone, it’s almost as if death comes a bit early even if not completely. And yet, no matter how far away Al’s mind became, his gentle smile, his kind spirit, his loving care still exuded from his body reminding everyone that the beautiful life of Al Cremens was still with us. And always will be as long as we remember him well and continue to tell his story and embody what he had to teach about love and grace and reconciliation.

Jeff noted that Al was a reconciler. He loved bringing people together. He loved peace and harmony, and I couldn’t help but think about this text from the 2nd letter to the church in Corinth: . . . . . ministry of reconciliation . . .

**16**From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+5%3A11-20&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28878a)] even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+5%3A11-20&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28878b)] we know him no longer in that way. **17**So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! **18**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; **19**that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+5%3A11-20&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28881c)] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. **20**So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Thanks be to God for the very good life of Al Cremens. May he bring warmth and gentleness and love to Kingdom of Heaven just as he did on earth. May it be so. Amen.