



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Herbert Chilstrom, first ELCA presiding bishop, dies at 88

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Herbert W. Chilstrom, 88, the first presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), died Jan. 19 at his home in Green Valley, Ariz. He was born in Litchfield, Minn., on Oct. 18, 1931.

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Corinne (Hansen), also a Lutheran pastor; a daughter, Mary Cress of Mesa, Ariz.; and a son, Christopher Holt of Baltimore; and four sisters, Winnifred Christenson of Robbinsdale, Minn.; Virginia Francis of Pickens, S.C.; Martha (Charles) Anderson of Ashby, Minn.; and Janet (Frederick) Sickert of West Linn, Ore.

Chilstrom completed academic degrees at Augsburg University, Augustana Seminary, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Princeton Seminary, and New York University, where he earned a doctor of education degree.

He served Lutheran congregations in Pelican Rapids, Elizabeth and St. Peter, Minn.

He was professor and dean at Luther College, Teaneck, N.J., from 1962-1970. In 1976 he was elected bishop of the Minnesota Synod of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). At the 1987 merger that created the 5.2-million-member ELCA, he was elected the first presiding bishop.

Chilstrom was awarded 15 honorary doctorates by 15 colleges, universities and seminaries. He was named a Commander of the Royal Order of the North Star by King Carl Gustav IV of Sweden, received the Pope John XXIII award from Viterbo College, the Servus Dei Award from the ELCA, as well as numerous other honors and awards.

Chilstrom served on numerous boards of directors, including vice president of the Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland; Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.; Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota; Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn.; the National Council of Churches and others.

He also authored numerous books and articles.

After retirement he continued to be active in church and community, preaching and lecturing in many parts of the country. He became a Minnesota Master Gardener, volunteering and serving as interim director at the Linnaeus Arboretum at Gustavus Adolphus College.

The family prefers that memorial gifts be given to the Herbert Chilstrom Chair in New Testament Studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, or to one of the Chilstrom Student Scholarship Funds at Luther Seminary; Augsburg University, Minneapolis; Gustavus Adolphus College, or Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn.

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About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.5 million members in more than 9,100 worshiping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

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