



## Dr. Thomas "Tom" Jefferson Ballard, Jr.

June 13, 1936 - July 19, 2025

Dr. Thomas "Tom" Jefferson Ballard, Jr.

89, passed away peacefully and surrounded by family on July 19, 2025 in Indianapolis. He lived a long and full life dedicated to family and service to God and the many congregants at churches he served for over half a century. Tom's outgoing personality, positive influence, and love for humanity were felt by countless people every place he lived, and he lived in 11 states. His gentle manner, inviting smile, and love of people endeared him to so many. Feeling a call to the ministry as a teenager, he preached his first sermon at age 17 and his last in his mid 80's. He was a champion of underdogs; he hated bullies; he was fearless in standing up to defend the weak against the powerful. He possessed a large supply of jokes.

Tom was born on June 13, 1936 in Marks, Mississippi, where his family ran the general store. In a place and time where segregation was the norm, his family welcomed everyone through the front door of their store. Starting at a young age he passionately believed in justice and human rights. Tom advocated for civil rights for minorities, women, and all persons and groups at risk. Throughout his 65 years of ministry, he never hesitated to teach the Word of God as he saw it as applied to real issues in society. Always with a smile on his face and eager to strike up conversation, he never apologized for his belief that all people are God's children and deserve to be treated fairly and with dignity. He loved connecting with people so much that he would stand outside the church every Sunday after services and talk with anyone for as long as

they wished, often to the impatience of his young sons.

Tom was a family man, devoted to his wife Mary Louise “Lou” Smith and their three sons. Tom and Lou met at Sunflower Junior College and married in 1957, and they then went together to Mississippi College, where Lou graduated with a degree in education and Tom with a degree in religion. He went on to earn his Master of Divinity degree at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO, and his Doctorate in Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. His dissertation was on the Book of Job. While in graduate school, he helped pay his way by working on the Saturn V rocket boosters. He also worked at various times as a Fuller brush salesman and as a taxicab driver. He could build things too, including furniture for his children, outdoor structures (fueled by skills he picked up working for Habitat for Humanity), and the like, which he did in his spare time.

After several years as a professor teaching theology at Gardner Webb College in North Carolina, he went into the full-time ministry in 1972 as a Presbyterian pastor, serving at churches in Sumter, South Carolina; Atlanta and Carrollton, Georgia; and Knoxville, Tennessee. Every summer for many years, Tom and his family could be found at Montreat, the national Presbyterian retreat center nestled in the mountains of North Carolina. After retiring from his main church appointments in 2001, he had a second fulltime career as an interim pastor at about ten more churches in Illinois, North Carolina, Tennessee, and upstate New York. In his lifetime, he was pastor at about 15 churches in seven states. His last position was as a volunteer chaplain at Highlands Independent Living retirement center in Massachusetts, prior to moving in 2023 to Indianapolis, where he and Lou settled at Rittenhouse Village at Northside for his last two years of life.

Throughout his career, Tom could often be found in hospitals, visiting and comforting congregants who were sick or injured. On Sundays, he would be in the pulpit, preaching. He particularly enjoyed baptizing infants and would wander around the sanctuary, holding the baby and explaining the meaning of it all. Over his career, he baptized hundreds of people, and, as he liked to say,

he married dozens of beautiful women. He also studied other religions and believed in connecting church communities, often serving as a liaison for ecumenical services among different religious faiths.

Tom and Lou had 68 years together, and they spent almost all their free time in each other's company. His partner in everything, Lou was active in the churches they served together, supporting him and his ministry. He was proud of her, from her success as a basketball player in college to her work in women's groups in church and her singing in the choir.

Tom was active for decades in Habitat for Humanity and has a street named after him in Paris, Illinois, where he started a chapter. He was a Mason, and he was active in the Rotary Club, where he often spoke about efforts to eradicate polio worldwide. Causes he believed in (Habitat for Humanity, McGovern for President) were proudly displayed on family cars.

A voracious reader, Tom enjoyed reading (and re-reading) the Bible (57 times by latest count), listening to music, and practicing and teaching yoga. When not at church or with family, Tom and Lou loved hanging out in coffee shops and finding new restaurants of all kinds.

A Celebration of Life service will be held Monday, August 18, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. at Second Presbyterian Church, 7700 North Meridian Street, Indianapolis, will visitation one hour prior.

Tom is survived by his wife, Mary Louise Smith Ballard; three sons, Jeffrey D. Ballard, Steven R. Ballard, and Gregory C. Ballard; and six grandchildren, Zach Ballard, Julia Ballard, Max Ballard, Sarah Ballard, Lena Ballard Gross, and Alexa Ballard.

Tom's family is especially grateful to the staff (nurses and care workers) at Rittenhouse Village for all they did for him in the last year and a half of his life. He was truly loved and cared for there.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to Habitat for Humanity and/or the charity of the donor's choice.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

AUG 18. 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (ET)

Second Presbyterian Church  
7700 North Meridian Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46260

## Celebration of Life

AUG 18. 1:00 PM (ET)

Second Presbyterian Church  
7700 North Meridian Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46260

# Tribute Wall

AN

“ I am a member of Fountain City Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, TN. I remember one time Tom taught a class about yoga. In the class he had us eat a Fuji apple with our eyes closed as he urged us to think about what we were eating. I have never forgotten that and I still love yoga and I always eat Fuji apples. I missed him and Lou dearly when they left and I would think of them often. My prayers to Lou, his sons and grandchildren.



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**Amy Jones Nutter** - August 11, 2025 at 09:38 AM

CS

“ Tom did so much to keep the Stevens Ministry alive and working in our Church, it finally is no more for lack of leadership. Thank you caring Tom. We know for sure where you are now

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**carol smith** - August 10, 2025 at 04:02 PM

BL

“ Lou: Carroll and Brenda are praying for you and your family. It was a pleasure to work with him at Ftn City Pres. A wonderful man who will be missed.

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**Brenda and Carroll Logan** - August 08, 2025 at 10:25 PM

FP

“ Fountain City Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, TN gives thanks to God for the ministry of Rev. Ballard. He served as Associate Pastor from 1993 to 2000. We pray for the family as they mourn their loss.



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**Fountain City Pres** - August 06, 2025 at 09:03 AM

JB

*Thank you so much, Fountain City Presbyterian Church. We appreciate your thoughts and prayers.*

*-Jeff Ballard*

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**Jeff Ballard** - August 07, 2025 at 01:35 AM

JB

*A gentle, loving Christian man! Thank God for his life of service to others! John Bacot*

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**John Bacot** - August 07, 2025 at 07:38 PM