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JOSEPH ALTON JONES



Joseph Alton Jones was born in Alto, Texas, August 24, 1910, the son of John Williamson and Ima (Banks) Jones. He was reared by a farming family in the difficult days of the Great Depression along with three younger brothers. As a young boy at a revival meeting at Mt. Zion Methodist Church, he heard the calling of the Lord, and wanted to be a minister.

Alton graduated from Central High School in Alto, Texas. He worked hard to earn his way through school by riding a donkey to town waiting tables, throwing newspapers and doing odd jobs. Lon Morris College (1929-31), helped him get started in school and he was always fiercely loyal to them. Then he went to Southwestern University (1933-35) in Georgetown. He then attended Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University.

Alton in 1929 received his license to preach in Jacksonville; in 1937 was received on trial in Texas; in 1939 was ordained deacon; in 1941 ordained elder. Alton's dream as a boy to become a minister became a reality on November 7, 1937.

In 1931, while working at Rusk State Hospital, he met Vina Irene Murdock, and got married January 3, 1938. His first appointment was Elysian Fields Circuit (1937-39) and Irene, who was a Baptist, became his first member in the congregation to join the Methodist Church. when they would reminisce about his years in the ministry, it was a special event both would bring up. In 1939 they packed up their belongings and off to Port Acres they moved (1939-41). When they stopped at a drug store for water, Irene saw a cut glass boat bowl. She would like to have the bowl but having just a quarter they could not afford such frills. Alton knew she would like that bowl so he bought it and surprised her with it. Irene treasured that bowl over all the other gifts that he would give to her in the future.

The year 1941, World War II, Alton signed up for service to be a Chaplain in the U.S. Army. He did not talk much about those four years, but it imprinted him as it did everyone. He saw the horrors of Dachau and other places throughout Germany. His outfit occupied Hitler's summer residence, and he even wrote home to his wife on the Fuerher's personal stationery. Alton was discharged as a Major (1947), but did not sign up for any of the veterans benefits. Alton felt it was his duty to serve his country.

After the war he resumed his ministry with the Texas Conference serving: Malakoff (1945-48), Grapeland (1948-50), LaMarque (1950-54), Trinity Port Arthur (1954-59). While at Trinity Port Arthur, they heard of a little girl up for adoption. When they checked into it they discovered a brother and sister that were in poor health and had been taken away from their mother and other siblings. Only the sister was up for adoption. When they saw the two children and heard the history of them, they fought to adopt both children and they succeeded on November 26, 1955. They named their son John Randel and their daughter Joyce Ann. Trinity Port Arthur Church also took those two children and adopted them as if they were their own. Alton heard of an opening as Executive Secretary of the Town and Country Circuit (1959-64) that would be dealing with helping the rural churches. He traveled all over East Texas visiting and helping build up the rural churches, which he loved so much. His next transfers were Winnie-Stowell (1964-68), Madisonville (1968-70), San Augustine (1970-71). In 1971 Alton decided to step down from preaching and became Administrator of the Community Home in Port Arthur (1971-72). While living with the elderly, he found a renewing of the spirit of the Lord. His next appointment was to Pleasant Retreat in Tyler (1972-74) and the church he would retire from Elkhart Church (1974-75). Alton's longtime friend, Rev. Walter Willis, was having health problems so he preached for him at Tennessee Colony Church until Rev. Willis could come back. Then he served Good Springs (1978-80) and Brushy Creek/Mt. Vernon (1980-87). While serving Brushy Creek/Mt. Vernon, he experienced several major health problems, and the loss of his wife. He made it through the valley of shadows with the prayers and support of those two rural churches. He felt it was officially time to step down and let the next generation take over. Mt. Vernon Church honored him for his fifty years of service to the ministry by dedicating their fellowship hall to him and it was like winning the Presidency to him.

After Irene's death, he leaned heavily on the Lord and wondered what now. When he went back to Central High School reunion, the doors opened again for him in Mary Kate Bates. On April 18, 1990, the same day she got out of the hospital, they got married. He said the reasons he did not wait was he wanted to be able to take care of her right then. Though their time together was short, the love for each other showed. He was retired and planned to just visit people and garden, but then in 1993 he had a heart attack. The hospital in Nacogdoches sent him home to pack and go to Houston

for open heart surgery. Alton had not planned on having surgery, but again the Lord stepped in through Oliver Griffith. He got to the hospital that night and with the Lord's hand on his shoulder they were able to save his life. They performed triple bypass surgery and he recovered so fast for a man of his age that the doctors could not believe it. His hobbies would have to be: love of the church, children, visiting people and gardening. He was a lifetime member of the Masonic Lodge at Elkhart, a member of the Garden Club of Anderson County.

On February 23, 1995, at his home in Alto, it was time to go to be with the Lord he loved and served so faithfully. His service was February 25, 1995, at A. Frank Smith United Methodist Church in Alto officiated by: Rev. Dr. George Wilson, Rev. David E. Williamson and Rev. Dr. Jack Shultz. He was buried at the Texas Methodist Conference Cemetery in Elkhart, Texas. Alton is survived by: his wife, Mary Kate Bates Jones; his son John Randel and wife Carol, and their daughter Kristy N. Jones; and his daughter Joyce Ann Jones.

I feel that Rev. Dr. George Wilson said it best at Alton's funeral service: "What better way to summarize Alton's life than in the words of the Apostle... *A letter from Christ, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God.* The best argument there is for the reality of God is to see a life like Alton's...for God is the only way to explain it...God is the only way to understand it."

Joyce Ann Jones, Daughter

BASIL W. JONES



Basil William Russell Jones was born in Platteville, Wisconsin, on September 6, 1915, the only child of James E. and Celia (Russell) Jones. His father was a Methodist minister; consequently, Basil spent his childhood in parsonages.

He attended Central Wesleyan and Park Colleges in Missouri, Garrett Seminary in Illinois and received his BD from Perkins School of Theology in 1946. He was ordained in the fall of 1946 as an Elder.

Basil served Oak Lawn Methodist Church in the North Texas Conference while in seminary. Churches served in the Texas Conference were First Methodist, LaMarque (1946-51), First Methodist, Lake Jackson (1951-57), North End, Beaumont (1957-58), Sunset, Pasadena (1958-61), St. Marks, Baytown (1961-64), First Methodist, Texas City (1964-67). He was on special appointment by the Conference to the Texas Rehabilitation Commission until his retirement in 1977.

He married Esther Eileen Earnshaw in 1942. There are two sons; James Howard, Houston and Jonathan Russell, Texas City. James has two sons, Greg and Jeff. Russell has a daughter, Carrie with two children, Jeremy and Dustin and a son, Jon.

Basil and Esther were divorced in 1976 and he married Jo Branton Fowler. He had two stepsons, Nick and Gary Fowler, and three granddaughters, Kristin, April, and Mackenzie Fowler.

Basil moved to Austin after his marriage to Jo, and for most of those years until his death worshipped at Northwest Hills United Methodist Church maintaining his connection with the Texas Conference. He enjoyed his hobbies, which included wood carving and photography. He died suddenly on March 25, 1995. Memorial services were held at NW Methodist in Austin with his friend and pastor, Dr. Ray Kiser officiating. In his remarks at the memorial service, Dr. Kiser said, "He preached love. He practiced love. And he leaves us a rich legacy of love."

Jo Jones