

**Eugene C. Olson**  
**11/12/28-1/6/12**

As the writer of Ecclesiastes so eloquently put it, “*for everything there is a season, and a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to play and a time to work. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance.*”

Dear Phyllis, Gene, Chris, Gerry, Shari, friends and family, today is a time to grieve for Gene. It’s a time to cry: we have to say goodbye to someone we care about. It’s a time to mourn: the world is a less friendly place without his big warm smile. And yet, we can hold fast to the hope that this time will pass, and we trust that God *will* turn our mourning into dancing. That is, after all, part of the cycle of the cosmos – birth gives way to life, which passes into death. And amidst it all, we can believe that God is holding all our days in his hand. They all belong to God.

Eugene Clinton Olson’s *time to be born* was in Minneapolis, Minn., on Nov. 12, 1928. Life was hard for young Gene. He grew up during the Depression. There was never very much money, or much love to go around.

Starting at an early age, it was Gene’s *time to work*. When he was 5 he used to have to walk a couple of miles with his wagon to pick up coal to heat the house. Because his parents were frequently away, Gene was in charge of taking care of his younger siblings. As soon as he was old enough to get paid, he always had a job: Working in a butcher shop plucking chickens. (He never could eat chicken after that.) Driving the parcel delivery truck when he was 11. Along the way he discovered he was

good at two things: sales, and fixing things. It was a perfect combination for a man who would go on to have a career in electronics.

When Gene was in high school he was the kind of guy all the girls go for: tall, handsome, polite. One girl in particular decided she really wanted to go with him. Her name was Phyllis Ostlund. But she was too shy to ask him, or maybe he was too shy to ask her. Finally, Phyllis' sister told Gene he should make a move ... and luckily, he listened. That was the start of Gene's *time to love*.

Besides Phyllis, one of Gene's passions was music. His taste ran from jazz to country to big band to modern ... pretty much whatever happened to be on was good by him. He played the keyboard, trombone, steel guitar. When he was in high school he thought about playing in a band full-time. Phyllis put a stop to that. She wasn't sure she wanted to marry a musician. Clearly Gene loved Phyllis more than he loved the idea of making a living in the band. They celebrated their 61<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary this past summer.

Not long after they got married, Gene came along, then Gerry. The family moved to Howard Lake so Gene could open a TV and electronics store. They stayed busy with work and scouts and sports. But there was *time to play*, too. There were vacations to Florida and to the Alamo in Texas. They built a cabin in Alexandria, and spent lots of time out on the boat. Gene taught pretty much everybody how to waterski. And even though he rarely sat still – there were always projects to do, errands to run – Gene would drop everything when one of the grandkids asked him to read them a story.

Maybe because Gene had to find supportive mentors of his own, he took particular care to look out for others. He was patient and kind, with a deep soft voice

that worked wonders on dogs and babies. There were always folks hanging around his shop because they knew the coffee'd be on and Gene would be up for conversation. He paid attention to people, listening to their stories and remembering details about their lives. And nothing was more important than his family. Gene's whole life was *a time to build up*. That may be his most lasting legacy.

Yes, for everything there is a season, and a time for every activity under heaven. Gene made the most of his time to live. But the last year of his life was especially hard. His health was failing, his memory grew dim, and he had to move away from home. Oh, he wasn't one to complain, but it was hard to see this strong man fade away. His final weeks went too fast. There's always more "I love you" we want to say, one more hug we want to give, one more story we want to tell. But his days were done, and last Friday it was his *time to die*.

We don't always understand God's time. But we can understand God's heart. It's a big heart, with lots of room. It's a generous heart, one that gave us Gene to know and to love. It's a caring heart, which builds us up through the love of family and friends like Gene. It's a forgiving heart, which continues to call us back home with ever open arms.

So now it is time. It's time to bid Gene farewell, for today, anyway. Someday our mourning will give way to dancing. And because of Jesus' love we know that nothing – not miles, not time, not space, not even death – nothing can separate us from God's loving heart. Thanks be to God. Amen.