



Philip Andrew Esserwein

August 12, 1944 - June 15, 2026

On June 15, 2026, Philip Andrew Esserwein of Catonsville, MD, leaped into the embrace of God and his beloved wife Susan. Phil was born in Baltimore on August 12, 1944, the son of Wade C. Esserwein and Roberta Howard Esserwein. He graduated from St. Charles Seminary High School and College and from St. Mary's Seminary/University, Paca Street, in 1966 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Liberal Arts. He later studied theology at the North American College in Rome.

Phil poured out his life as a musician, teacher, composer, author, poet, and recording engineer. Phil served as music minister at St. John's Interfaith Center, Columbia, MD beginning in 1968, sharing that ministry with his wife Sue for many years. Phil also taught for three decades at St. Philip Neri School in Linthicum, Maryland, where many students remember him as a gifted teacher of music. His middle school choir performances and Christmas pageants were legendary. Former student Mikayla Dodge recalls, "He wasn't just my middle school music teacher, he shaped me into the musician I am today. The confidence he instilled, the opportunities to grow at such a young age, and the support he gave, encouraged and inspired me to go into a career as a professional musician."

In addition to the students he taught, Phil's most significant legacy was the powerful liturgical music he created. Longtime friend Al Reichelt asserts that

Phil had a passionate commitment to bring “the Word into people’s hearts through music.” Phil composed his own music and coauthored, produced, and performed additional liturgical music with Sue. Together Phil and Sue founded Starfire-Muse Studio Productions in 1994. Larry Owens, who with his wife Valerie was a performer with the Starfire artists and an arranger and recorder of Phil’s music, recalls the power and substance of Phil’s music and lyrics: “In a world with Contemporary Christian Music that is often referred to as 7-11 songs (the same 7 words sung 11 times) ... Phil gave us lines like these: ‘The night full of mystery enfolds him; the day full of joy spreads the news, that God has sent this child to us to rule us with love in the truth.’”

All of Phil’s published works can be heard through Pandora, Amazon, Apple Music, Spotify, You Tube, and other streaming platforms.

Phil and Sue married in 1980, and their 45-year marriage was grounded in faith, love, laughter, and music. After Sue’s death last November, Phil recalled their playful and affectionate relationship, which included calling each other “Peep,” and the delight and challenge of creating music together. Phil and Sue also bonded deeply in their spirituality. According to Phil, Sue and he “were always trying to move beyond who we were to what we could become.”

Phil’s daughter Lovella remembers her father as “a man of deep faith, wisdom, and kindness. He loved thoughtful conversations about life, spirituality, music, and the things that truly matter. He had a big, gentle heart, a childlike curiosity with a playful demeanor. Even through profound loss, grief, and pain, he never lost his goofy sense of humor. He and Mom inspired me with their courage, positivity, and determination He touched countless lives through his music, his wisdom, his compassion, and his willingness to encourage others.”

Larry Owens sums up Phil’s effect on himself and on so many friends: “Phil was created in God’s image Almost 40 years of knowing Phil has helped

to show me what God looks like.”

In addition to his daughter Lovella, Phil is survived by his grandson Chey, his sister Ruth Norwood, nephews Timothy and David Norwood and Andrew C. Esserwein, and many cherished friends. Phil was predeceased by his beloved wife Sue, his parents, and his brother Charles W. Esserwein.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Saturday, July 11, at 11:00 AM at Saint Joseph’s Monastery, 3801 Old Frederick Rd, Baltimore, MD 21229. The family will receive friends in the church beginning at 10:00 AM. The Mass will also be live-streamed at <https://www.youtube.com/@saintjosephmonasteryparish7861>.

Interment will be private.

Memorial contributions may be made to The Lewy Body Dementia Association: <https://lbda.org/donate> or to Robin’s Wish at the American Brain Foundation: <https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/robins-wish/>.