



Ruth Ellen Swenson

September 16, 1941 - September 9, 2026

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Ruth Ellen Swenson died in Sioux Falls on September 9, 2026. She was eighty-four. Born there on September 16, 1941, she grew up in a house where the church bulletin was treated as a legal document and a pot of coffee was treated as a ministry. She learned a keyboard before she learned a highway. A correct hymn, she said, is a form of respect.

She spent twenty years as a bank teller and thirty more as the woman who played the organ when a funeral had more weather than it had a choir. She did not put her name on a committee. She put other people's names in the right order. When a pastor left in a hurry she kept the keys and the coffee and the calendar until the next one learned which stop stuck.

She married Howard Swenson in 1961. He sold seed and died in 2001. They raised a son and a daughter who still argue about who got the last piece of caramel cake. Ruth kept the garden of peonies, and the habit of leaving a casserole on a porch without a speech. She sat through long meetings the way other people sit through weather.

Grandchildren remember a woman who corrected their thank-you notes more than their homework, who kept a biscuit tin of paper clips, and who could name every auntie in the sanctuary by the hat she no longer wore. She died in Sioux Falls, in the wind she had always said you could live with if you dressed for it. The bulletin is someone else's now. The patience she practiced there is harder to replace than a hymnal.

Services

A funeral in Sioux Falls with one familiar hymn, sung slowly. A gift to the church music fund is welcome.

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