

RALPH, S. Lester



Former Mayor of Somerville

The Reverend S. Lester Ralph, formerly of Reading and Somerville, passed away August 20, 2019 at his home in Reading, Massachusetts. He was 88 years old. Born and raised in Lynn, he attended Boston University where he received a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree, and a Law degree. He also received a Master of Divinity Degree and an honorary doctoral degree from the Virginia Theological Seminary. He received innumerable other recognitions, awards, and commendations.

In 1969, as an unknown minister, he toppled the incumbent mayor of Somerville in an upset political victory. He was a much needed reformer in an age of rampant corruption. In 1971, he opened City Hall to reporters from The Boston Globe, who exposed deep-rooted municipal corruption in the first ever Globe Spotlight Series. This series went on to win a Pulitzer Prize.

Ralph transformed Somerville. From 1970-1978 he served four terms as Mayor. In 1972, under his leadership, Somerville was awarded the All America City Award. While mayor, Ralph revitalized the city, building multiple schools and fire stations, transforming public parks, and renovating libraries. He was at the forefront of expanding and improving public transportation and played an important role in bringing the Davis Square area to life when he helped to bring the Red Line to the city.

In addition to serving as Mayor, Ralph was the rector of Christ Church in Somerville for many years. He served as Middlesex County Commissioner. After retiring from politics, he maintained a successful private law practice. He touched and improved the lives of countless people.

Ralph is survived by his wife of 55 years, Joyce P. Ralph of Reading; daughter Sarah Ralph and her husband Peter Lydotes and their children Hannah, Preston and Betsy; son Thomas Ralph and his wife Hope Ralph and their children Eli and Luke of North Andover; and daughter Jennifer West and her husband Clarence West and their children Delia and Oliver of Shelburne Falls.

A memorial service will be held on Tuesday, August 27, at the Church of the Good Shepherd, 95 Woburn St., Reading, at 11 am. In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made by check to the Wonalancet Union Chapel, Amy Semmes, Treasurer, 120 Auburn St., Medford, MA 02155.