



Isaac (Ike) Z. Friesen

October 7, 2023

Isaac (Ike) Z. Friesen, 94, of Edinburg, Texas, peacefully entered the presence of the Lord in his home at Rio Grande Bible Ministries (formerly RGBI) on Saturday October 7, 2023. He was lovingly surrounded by family, friends, and care providers.

Ike was born on May 6, 1929, in Meade, Kansas, to parents Jacob and Katherina Classen Friesen. He entered a lively German Mennonite family as the youngest of fifteen children. At fifteen years of age, Ike invited Christ into his life as his personal Savior, and that decision became the foundation for his journey of full-time Christian service. Ike had two years of higher education at Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska (1948-1950). In September, 1950, he felt God's call to the Rio Grande Bible Institute in Edinburg, Texas, as a staff member and also to complete his Bible education, graduating in the class of 1952. After his arrival he met and fell in love with Helen Nina Borchers, who was secretary to the RGBI founder, M.C. Ehlert. They were married in August, 1951, and daughter, Pam, was born in 1953. Helen passed away in 2004, and in 2005, Ike married Viola Engstrom, a former missionary nurse to Mexico, who went to be with the Lord in 2021.

Throughout his seventy-three years of ministry at Rio Grande, Ike served in a number of roles. Along with his studies and beginning to learn Spanish, Ike initially had the important responsibilities of milking the RGBI cow, Mini, and

hauling the trash. Soon after his graduation in 1952, he was appointed by RGBI to begin a chaplain ministry with patients at the 1,000 bed Weaver Baker Memorial Sanatorium at Moore Field (Edinburg). Ike and his team shared the love and healing of Christ with each patient. Later, he supervised the Men's Work Program, which provided an excellent opportunity for connections with students. He was a close assistant to M.C. Ehlert in his ministry, both at the school and in Mexico. Together, they often visited churches that were started by RGBI alumni.

After Mr. Ehlert's death in 1965, Ike continued ministering as Director of the Christian Service Department (now Practical Ministries). He took students to Reynosa each week for children's classes, and for twenty-five years, he ministered in the Reynosa State Penitentiary, where many prisoners were introduced to new freedom in Christ. He also worked as the school's Purchasing Agent. His friendly, caring interest in business associates provided a direct connection between RGBI to these communities—values he learned from his mentor, M.C. Ehlert. Ike also served on RGBI's Board of Trustees for many years. More recently, he had the privilege of participating in the National Day of Prayer with city leaders in Edinburg. He also thoroughly enjoyed going each day to the Edinburg Post Office to get the RGBI mail. The mail carriers often called him "Preacher" when he arrived! In addition, he was part of RGBI's Finance Department, helping to open donations made to the school, count cash, and take deposits to the bank. He so appreciated this wonderful team of people who were a daily encouragement to him. Despite health issues for both Helen and Viola, and his own journey with cancer, Ike maintained a stable, unwavering trust in his Lord who walked with him every step of the way.

Ike loved his connections with all his Friesen, Borchers, and Engstrom family members, and with coworkers and friends at RGBI and the First Baptist Church in Edinburg. He will forever be remembered as the treasurer of the

“Whatabrother Trio” who met regularly at Whataburger to enjoy laughs and times of deep sharing.

Ike’s life can be summarized succinctly: Over his 94 years, he loved the Lord wholeheartedly, served the Lord with diligence, and unashamedly shared his deep faith with others and Christ’s love for them.

Those he leaves behind who hold cherished memories include: daughter, Pam; “adopted” family members: Sheri Koch, Manny and Jane Gutierrez, Henry and Judie Tippie, and Norma and Armand Rouleau; and a host of other family members, friends, RGBI alumni, and supporters.

Pam wishes to sincerely thank the many who were part of Ike’s competent health care team, the staff of Anchor of Love Hospice who so compassionately guided us through the last five months, and with deepest appreciation for his care providers who lovingly walked with us to the very end.

Memorials may be directed to the Student Aid or Student Missions/Internship Funds of Rio Grande Bible Ministries.

A Celebration Service will be held at 3 p.m. on Saturday, November 11, 2023, at the Friesen Building on the Rio Grande Bible Ministries campus.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

NOV 11. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (CT)

Rio Grande Bible Ministries
4300 S. Business Highway 281
Edinburg, TX 78539