

Elizabeth Orens died on January 16, 2026 at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, DC at the age of 86.

Elizabeth was born in Washington, DC, the daughter of George and Charlotte (Mills) Allan, and grew up in Arlington, Virginia. As a child she fell in love with the piano, and after high school studied at the Juilliard School of Music, graduating in 1961 with a diploma in piano. While at Juilliard, she became friends with students at nearby Union Theological Seminary and began to ponder a different career path. She returned to Washington and earned a bachelor's degree from American University in 1963. She then spent a year at Schiller College in Germany, studying philosophy, theology, and German literature. She continued her piano studies and gave recitals, but in the end she decided to enroll at Union.

She loved Union, and inspired by the civil rights movement, did field education at an African-American church in the Bronx. After earning a master's degree in religious education, she entered a joint MA program with Columbia University in literature and religion. There she met her future husband, John, who was working towards his doctorate in European history. After graduation, they married and moved to Englewood, New Jersey where Elizabeth taught religion at the Dwight School for Girls. Two years later, she left Dwight to begin a Ph.D program in theology and culture at Drew University. When the Episcopal Church began ordaining women, Elizabeth entered the M.Div. program at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her son, Geoffrey, was born in 1976, and Elizabeth was ordained to the priesthood in 1979. In 1982, after a curacy at St. Andrew's in nearby Belmont and non-stipendiary work at St. Peter's in Cambridge, she became assistant rector of Grace Church in Amherst. Elizabeth had the loving heart of a pastor and threw herself into parish ministry with joyful abandon. But because John was only able to find part-time teaching jobs, Elizabeth decided that they needed to be in a city so they both could have rewarding work. In 1987 she accepted the call to be senior chaplain at the National Cathedral School in Washington and John eventually became a professor of history at George Mason University. Elizabeth treasured her NCS students and colleagues, and was head of the religion department for several years. She also devoted herself to interfaith relations, serving as President and then Chair of the Board of the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington. And in the midst of all this, she had a circle of piano students.

Elizabeth returned to full-time parish ministry in 2007, becoming the rector of St. James', Parkton, in Baltimore County. She continued to teach piano, taking the train to Washington on her day off to guide those she called "the most wonderful students on God's earth." Elizabeth was at St. James' for five extraordinarily rewarding years. When she retired in 2012, her parishioners awarded her the title "rector emeritus." On her return to DC she was anything but retiring. She became an assisting priest first at All Souls Church and then at St. Paul's, Foggy Bottom, one of the first ordained women to serve there. She volunteered as the diocesan chaplain at the Washington Hospital Center and she established a Sacred Arts Group that gathered monthly for mutual support and to find ways to bring art to the wider community. She resumed her doctoral studies, and in 2021 received her D.Min. from Virginia Theological Seminary. She wrote poetry, published articles, embarked on scholarly research projects, and (of course) taught piano.

Elizabeth loved to travel. Among her favorite vacation spots were Nantucket, the Canadian Maritimes, and the English Lake District. On their fortieth wedding anniversary, she and John sailed across the Atlantic on Queen Mary 2 and, a few weeks later, sailed home. So began a tradition that continued for years. Elizabeth was also an ardent birder and an excellent chef, always on the lookout for a new dish to prepare. Above all, Elizabeth loved people in all their diverse individuality. She delighted in her friends and cherished her family. She shared their

joys, comforted them in their sorrows, and offered them—and indeed all who knew her—the gift of encouragement, reassurance, and faith.

In July 2024, Elizabeth suffered a stroke caused by a malignant lung tumor. With her characteristic quiet yet unshakable determination, she set about recovering. Her grace, courage, and resilience astonished her doctors and her rehabilitation therapists, one of whom remarked that Elizabeth was the most persistent patient she had ever met. Elizabeth was making remarkable progress and was thrilled to attend Geoffrey and his wife Tina's wedding in June 2025. But in December, she was admitted to the hospital with a massive lung inflammation of unknown origin. Although the inflammation passed, her lungs were badly damaged, and on January 16, after a valiant struggle, her body gave way.

Elizabeth is survived by her husband John, her son Geoffrey and his wife Tina, her nephew Steve and his wife Kelli, her niece Becky and her husband Tim, five grandnieces and grandnephews, and by the countless friends, colleagues, students, and parishioners she dearly loved and whose lives she deeply touched

Her funeral will be at St. Paul's, K Street in DC on April 25 at 11:30 am. In lieu of flowers, Elizabeth requested that contributions be made to Doctors without Borders, the Fund for the Future of Children, or the International Crane Foundation.