

Homegoing Celebration of  
**PHIL  
WENDLING**



October 14, 2025  
at 5:00pm

ST. JOSEPH'S INDIAN SCHOOL CHAPEL

Chamberlain, SD

# Remembering

Phil Wendling

"I hope it's not how you start life, but how you finish it." At least, that's what Phil taught us.

Phil Wendling lived a life marked by struggle, redemption, and profound love for others. Born in 1960 and adopted as a baby by Pastor Wendling and his wife, Miss Wendling, Phil carried with him a deep reverence for his parents. He often spoke of his father's role in planting a Lutheran church decades ago, and he treasured visiting that church throughout his life.

In his youth, Phil and his family survived the devastating Rapid City flood of 1972. He would recall the moment vividly: as the waters rose, his father told him to get his mother and brother to safety. Phil leapt into the flood, holding on to poles and pushing forward until his family was safe. He often said that was the day his father first saw him as a man.

Phil never hid the hardships of his journey. He spoke openly about his struggles with alcohol and the consequences he faced, including time in jail. Yet those same struggles became the foundation of his greatest testimony. Phil turned his life around and carried the message of recovery to countless others through Alcoholics Anonymous. He spoke at conferences, traveled on sober cruises, and inspired people from all walks of life and all corners of the world.

Phil was a man of many accomplishments. He earned his MBA, became a banker, and rose to the position of Vice President. Numbers came naturally to him, and he often joked about how his banking background made him the perfect fit to handle kids' allowances. He once had the opportunity to attend the School of Mines, and his friends never let him forget that he was the "genius" of the group.

Phil's Lakota heritage was always close to his heart. His journey to reconnect with his roots eventually led him to St. Joseph's Indian School, where he worked with Lakota youth for eight years. To some, he was a son, a brother, a father, and a friend. To many Lakota children, he was "Lala" or "Papa Phil."

His steady presence, pride in their accomplishments, and unwavering support left an imprint that will not be forgotten.

Phil was a walking proverb, an unforgettable hymn—wise, steady, sure, and true. The pastor's son who fought addiction and won. Once a prisoner, he became a hero. Through his constant testimony of recovery and hope, he helped us believe in miracles.

Phil's work is done. His crown is cast. The Savior has welcomed him home, a faithful servant. Until we hear that baritone voice again across the streets of gold, Phil will be deeply missed.

Tókša akhé, Phil.

