

John Glenn, astronaut and Presbyterian elder, dies at age 95

by [Gregg Brekke](#) in the [January 4, 2017](#) issue

John H. Glenn Jr., best known as the first American to orbit the earth, who was also a lifelong Presbyterian, died December 8 in Columbus, Ohio, at age 95.

Glenn was raised in New Concord, Ohio, and attended Westminster Presbyterian Church with his family. His mother was the first female ruling elder ordained in the congregation, where his father also served on the congregation's governing body, or session.

Glenn and his wife, Annie, continued to visit Westminster, the last time they came to worship being seven or eight years ago, said George St. Clair, a ruling elder.

"We've always been proud of them," St. Clair said.

Selected as an astronaut by the newly formed NASA in 1959, Glenn manned the first American orbital mission in 1962 aboard the *Friendship 7* space capsule, orbiting the earth three times in the nearly five-hour mission.

Following his retirement from NASA and from the Marine Corps as a colonel, Glenn became a U.S. senator for Ohio, serving from 1974 to 1999. During this time in Washington, D.C., he attended National Presbyterian Church, where he was a ruling elder in the session.

In 1998, at the age of 77, Glenn returned to space aboard the space shuttle *Discovery*, which made him the oldest person ever to have flown in space.

"To see [Earth] laid out like that only strengthens my beliefs," he said at the time, as reported by Religion News Service. "I know *awesome* is an overused word, but if anything is really awesome, it's looking out and seeing that."

Glenn saw no conflict between faith and scientific discovery.

"Science just records that we change with evolution and time," he said in an interview with the Associated Press in 2015. "It doesn't mean it's less wondrous, and it doesn't mean that there can't be some power greater than any of us that has been behind and is behind whatever is going on." —Presbyterian News Service