

A FLAGSHIP CHURCH

Everybody says that we're living in a "post-denominational" age. By that they mean that denominations, once the vanguard of a particular church's larger affiliation, now have faded from their lofty perch, as churches opt to keep their money and influence much closer to home. Among our Baptist family, there are a number of churches that have even dropped Baptist from their names. At one point in time, being Baptist gave a congregation a platform to be heard; now, it's viewed as a handicap.

I may be a dinosaur but I still believe that it's important for churches to work together with one another to accomplish missions and ministries that no one church could accomplish on its own. For that reason, at virtually every church I've served, I've worked to extend that congregation's witness by assuming leadership roles in association, state convention, and national bodies. Here at Mountain Brook Baptist Church, I've been on the executive committee of the Birmingham Baptist Association and have served on the association personnel committee. And as most in our church are aware, I also spent six years serving on the governing board of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, with one year as the CBF moderator.

I like to think of Mountain Brook Baptist Church as a "flagship" church. Some churches have such a reputation for ministry effectiveness that other congregations look to them as models. Mountain Brook Baptist Church carries such a role in Baptist life today.

Our reputation as a "flagship" church actually goes back to the tenure of Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr. Dr. Nelson served as the president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention during his time at Mountain Brook Baptist Church and through his leadership, Mountain Brook Baptist Church was known as a church of significance throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. As a college student, I remember how Mountain Brook Baptist Church was viewed by Alabama Baptists as a church on the move, and not only Dr. Nelson, but many of its lay members served on boards of institutions and agencies throughout Baptist life, something that still continues to this day.

But as with individuals, so with congregations, leadership must be practiced with humility. To say that Mountain Brook Baptist Church is a "flagship" church is not to say that we're better than other Baptist churches. It's simply to say that we understand how other congregations look to us to show them best practices, and the fact that so many churches copy our ministry initiatives is a testimony to how God's favor upon our fellowship spills out to other local churches. How does the old saying go? "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." What a privilege it is to see other churches looking to us for help in fulfilling their own sense of mission.

As God continues to find favor on our church in the years ahead, it will surely be because of our readiness to extend the witness of Mountain Brook Baptist Church through our service opportunities in the larger Baptist world. I do hope that other staff and lay people in Mountain Brook Baptist Church will avail themselves of opportunities to represent our church in places where important decisions are made for Christ. In fact, I will work toward that end, because Mountain Brook Baptist Church has too much to offer and so much of what we possess is something from which many churches around the world can surely benefit.

Dr. J. Douglas Dortch Jr.



SEPTEMBER 16, 2018

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL
75th Anniversary Memories of Mountain Brook Baptist Church

THE HULL LEGACY

From November 13, 1991 until his death on December 10, 2013, Dr. William E. (Bill) Hull was theologian in residence for Mountain Brook Baptist Church. This position was created from the vision of Dr. James D. Moebes, who had studied under Dr. Hull at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He captured for Mountain Brook Baptist Church Dr. Hull's international reputation as a preacher and teacher.

Dr. Hull came to Birmingham in 1986 to serve as provost at Samford University, from which he had graduated in 1950. During his lifetime, Dr. Hull wrote 21 books on theological subjects and Christian themes, contributed to 24 others, and lectured widely on college and seminary campuses.

He and his wife Wylodine Hester Hull joined Mountain Brook Baptist Church in November 1991, as he took the title of "consultant" in ministry. His Wednesday night studies of the Bible as applied to contemporary issues drew in listeners from the community as well as from the church membership. He took on a larger share of Sunday preaching and teaching and received the title of theologian in residence—a position that few churches could offer.

While serving Mountain Brook Baptist Church, he delivered 234 sermons and 624 studies for a total of 858 presentations. These were catalogued and indexed in a reference volume published by the church in 2009, entitled *Teaching and Preaching the Gospel: Sermons and Studies 1991-2008*.

During his years of ministry at Mountain Brook Baptist Church, he continued at Samford as "research professor." He served as acting president of Samford

University for one year, 1993, and he was president of Downtown Rotary Club, 2002-2003.

Before coming to Birmingham, Dr. Hull taught and served as provost at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, 1958-1975, and he was pastor of First Baptist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana, 1975-1987.

Recognizing the wide appeal of Dr. Hull, members of Mountain Brook Baptist Church established the Hull Legacy Project to publish his writings in book form. A committee was formed in 1996 consisting of David L. Carder as chair, Thomas L. Merrill as co-chair, Helen C. Mills as co-chair, Catherine B. Allen, William M. Johnson Jr., Atley A. Kitchings Jr., Dr. James D. Moebes, and Hall W. Thompson. More than 80 families of the church joined with other participants to amass a kick-off fund of nearly \$90,000.

He was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in 2007, but ALS did not halt the prolific output of Dr. Hull's thought and writing. He delivered his final public sermon to an overflow crowd at Mountain Brook Baptist Church on October 19, 2008. It was entitled "The Darkness That Is Light." It was published by the church in booklet form at request of numerous friends.

Though increasingly confined to home, with caregivers led by his wife and by his talented grandson Andrew Hull (also a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church), he continued to

write. He set a goal to write one book a year. He met that goal before he died at age 83. He hand-wrote each page with a pen, slowly pushing the finished page to the floor, where Andrew or a secretary put them in order. Then he edited the typescript. When death stilled his pen, he had completed six books in the Hull Legacy Series, and a seventh book was issued posthumously.

With funds remaining from the Hull Legacy fund, Dr. Hull's children directed that Mountain Brook Baptist Church engage in publishing and in hosting lecturers who could be emblematic of Dr. Hull's example. One publication was the 70th anniversary history of the church, *Higher Ground*, by Lee and Catherine Allen.

A writer in another state said, "Bill Hull is one of the giant intellects of the Southern Baptist Convention." Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School (which Dr. Hull had helped to come into existence), said that Dr. Hull was one of the most consequential Baptist leaders of the past century.

In 1996, Dr. Hull had noted that an adversarial and aggressive age had dawned. He said, "The challenge will be to harness breakthroughs of the information age while making our way toward unity. People who can bring a unifying vision will be at a high premium." That was one of his achievements.

While he was dying over five years, he tried to leave guidance for those who would inevitably follow him in death. He said, "So let us look now for His light in my darkness which may help you do the same when the lights seem to go out in your life."

"God approved of his gifts; Bill being dead yet speaks" (Hebrews 11:4).

THESE ARE THE TITLES OF HIS HULL LEGACY BOOKS:

Harbingers of Hope: Claiming God's Promises in Today's World, 2007 with Samford University Press.

Seminary in Crisis: The Strategic Response of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010 with Baptist History and Heritage Society.

Beyond the Barriers: Overcoming Hostility in the Church, rev. ed., 2012 with Samford University Press and Mercer University Press.

The Lord's Prayer: Bringing Heaven and Earth Together, 2013 with Samford University Press.

The Apostles' Creed: A Baptist Interpretation, 2013 with Samford University Press.

The Quest for a Good Death: A Christian Guide, 2014 with Samford University Press.

Conservatism and Liberalism in the Christian Faith: Toward a Moderate Approach, 2015 (Final Volume in the Hull Legacy Series) with Nurturing Faith/Baptists Today.



Dr. and Mrs. William Hull

