

KEEPING A VIGIL FOR JESUS: A MOUNTAIN BROOK BAPTIST TRADITION FOR 23 YEARS

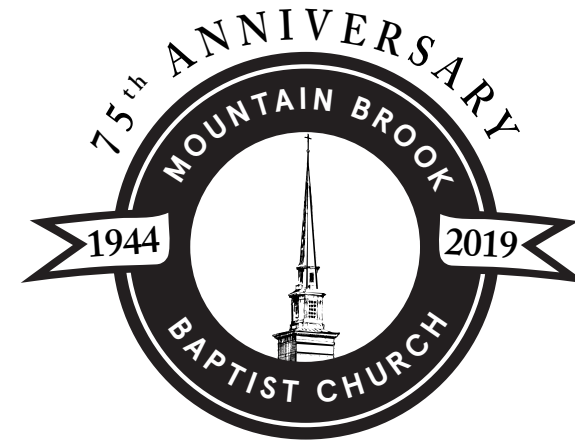
“Remain here and keep watch with Me.” He went a little beyond them and fell on His face and prayed. And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. “So you could not keep watch with Me for one hour?” (from Matthew 26:36–46)

Robert Emmerson Patrick was chairman of Deacons in 1996. As an engineer he had heavy professional management responsibilities. As a Deacon he was very involved in maintenance decisions for the church. He taught Sunday School—adults and children. He was husband of Emma Laura Patrick, director of children’s activities, so he helped with activities for hundreds of children. If anybody wondered how he did so much, they would learn that Bob Patrick prayed a lot. Preparing for Easter, Bob read Bible accounts of the struggles of Jesus, as His arrest and crucifixion approached. The passage quoted above moved him deeply. Could he keep watch with Jesus for even one hour? Could Deacons of the church keep a vigil for Jesus before Easter? After talking over his idea with some leaders, he announced a prayer vigil leading up to Easter. He invited Deacons to come to the church, to pray for one hour leading up to Easter Sunday. Would they come? Would the deacons be more faithful than Peter, James, and John had been to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane?

The prayer vigil was set to start at 3 p.m. on the afternoon of Good Friday. The vigil would continue until 8 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning. Every hour, a Deacon would be at the church to pray for at least one hour, then hand off to another Deacon. Other Deacons volunteered to be present for security and back-up. More than 60 Deacons signed up on the timetable. The Chapel was set with a praying bench at the front. An album of prayer requests, a Bible, and various prayer lists were set before the prayer bench. Candles were lit. All through the night and days, prayers were lifted from bended knees. Strict silence was maintained throughout. Easter Sunday morning was glorious. Bob Patrick was there most of the time, all night on Friday and Saturday. For some Deacons, it was a new and thrilling experience to kneel alone in silence for prayer for a whole hour, in a place made holy by the prayers of years of faithful people. Every year since 1996, the Easter Prayer Vigil had been maintained by Deacons. People forgot that the idea originated with Bob Patrick, until his funeral service with large attendance on September 22, 2018. In 2019, many will think of Bob during the Easter Prayer Vigil.

With the arrival of Dr. J. Douglas Dortch Jr. as senior minister, some updates were added to the Prayer Vigil starting in 2012. Dr. Dortch wrote a spiritual meditation for the praying Deacons. The late-night praying slots were shifted from the Chapel to other sites that a Deacon might choose. Yet the prayer chain was unbroken. Billy Bates, who has participated in the Easter Prayer Vigil for many years and was chairman in 2018, wrote this: “I found that praying alone in the Chapel at 2 a.m. was quite moving.” Emma Laura Patrick could not find any paperwork that Bob left behind about the Easter Prayer Vigil. It didn’t take a lot of paperwork. It was a Bible idea that Bob passed on to Deacons, and they have kept it going without much ado. Emma Laura remembers only that Bob wanted members to prepare their hearts for Holy Week and for the full meaning of the resurrection.

Dr. Dortch once wrote this message to the praying Deacons: “Our church is better when our lay leaders commit themselves to such spiritual discipline. Please continue to pray for our Easter services. Pray that those who come that special Sunday will experience the presence of the risen Jesus and will be so transformed by their experience that they will want to be with us again and again. Because He lives, we can most definitely face all our tomorrows.” Whether you sleep or watch on Easter Eve, know that because of Bob Patrick’s faithful service to the Lord, a Deacon of Mountain Brook Baptist Church will be watching and praying—for you.



APRIL 14, 2019

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

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Maundy Thursday has become one of the most important special worship services of our church. It is a reminder of the night when our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. It was on Thursday that He gave to His disciples the new commandment: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35 NRSV).

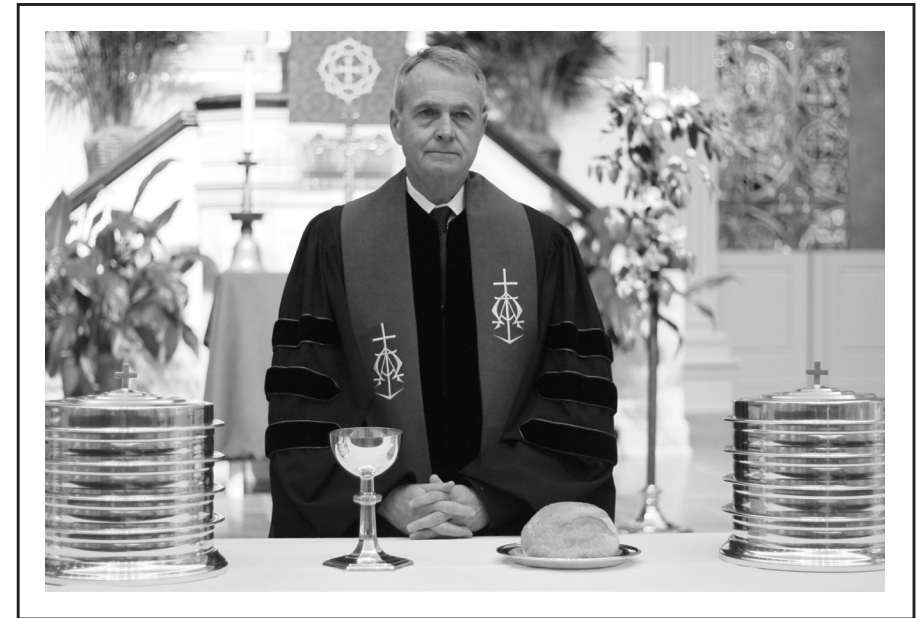
As early as 1992, our church adopted the term "Maundy Thursday" to describe a solemn service on Thursday night before Easter. Churches of other denominations had been having Maundy Thursday services for centuries, but it brought new thinking to Mountain Brook Baptist Church. At first, it was a time of devotional preaching and deep personal prayer, with the Sanctuary darkened and an open-ended conclusion.

With the arrival of Dr. J. Douglas Dortch Jr. as pastor in 2011, followed by Dr. Kely Hatley coming as minister of music in October 2012, expanded vistas opened. The first portion of our service begins with a small homily from the senior minister and moves rapidly into the observance of the Lord's Supper. Following the supper, we mentally shift from the supper to Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. We often read aloud the seven last words of Christ from the cross.

The Sanctuary Choir presents choral settings of these texts or other important works that deal with the crucifixion. One worship piece presented in recent years has been "Christ Lay in Death's Strong Bands."



Maundy Thursday is one of the four times of the year we observe the Lord's Supper in the Sanctuary.



Dr. Dortch leads the congregation in observance of the Lord's Supper at the Maundy Thursday service.

This is a seven movement cantata by J.S. Bach. Other past productions include "The Seven Last Words from the Cross" by Heinrich Schütz, "The Passion According to St. Luke" by J.S. Bach, "Seven Last Words" by John Michael Trotta, and "Nine Passion Motets" by Michael Haydn.

Our final act in the worship service is to follow the ancient traditional practice of "stripping the altar." The choir has used the simplified chant setting of Psalm 22 which points to the crucifixion. Church members removed all special decoration from the altar area—such as plants, candles, altar paraments, communion ware, flags, or flowers. The focal area of the church is totally bare. The choir leaves the loft, continuing to chant. The lights of the Sanctuary are dimmed out to total darkness symbolizing the death of Christ. The choir chants: "They divide My garments among them. They cast lots for My clothing."

The weight of the emotion of this service rests heavily on each worshiper as he or she leaves in silence and in darkness. While we leave in somberness, we have the hope of Easter morning on the horizon. Our hearts ache to return that Sunday to proclaim, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

*Dr. Kely Hatley
Minister of Music*