

## A FIRST—NOT FORGOTTEN

Mountain Brook Baptist Church got along for 13 years with only one full-time staff member—the pastor. Other helpers worked on a part-time basis. Buildings were too small to accommodate varied activities. That changed after a four-floor education building was added beginning in 1955. By 1957, with many classrooms and a Fellowship Hall, the horizon lifted.

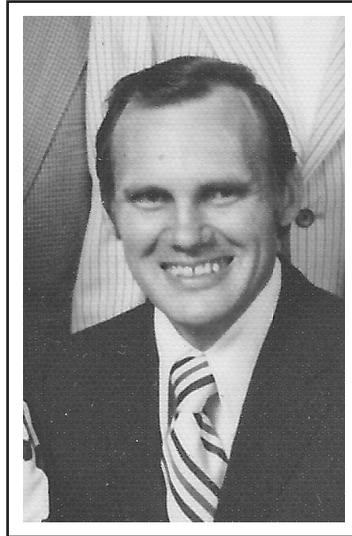
The Rev. William R. Williamson (Bill) was the first full-time minister added to work with the pastor. Bill Williamson and his wife Merle are still living today—age 87—in Waycross, Georgia. Bill retired there as minister of education at First Baptist Church.

Bill and Merle arrived at Mountain Brook Baptist Church on April 1, 1957, with their two children. They served until October 1, 1961. The Williamsons lived in a house owned by the church on Overbrook Road, which had been used for classrooms until the education building was completed. Bill's assignment was officially to develop a youth and recreation ministry. But as part of a two-man staff, he did whatever was needed. He had just graduated with a degree in religious education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He enjoyed putting his up-to-date seminary training into practice. It was only after his arrival that men's and women's classes were well organized.

Bill Williamson started Friday night fun for youth—complete with newly purchased skates which could be used in the new Fellowship Hall. He took the youth to attend Christian conferences. Bill enjoyed working with enthusiastic church members.

Bill had been on staff barely two years when the Rev. William Waterhouse resigned as pastor. It took the church two long years to enlist a new pastor. During that time, Bill carried the full staff load, with the addition of Sunday preaching primarily done by Dr. Mabry Lunceford of the Samford religion department. How could Bill handle this work load? He remembers today, "Well, it was still a small church, with not too many members."

After Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr.'s arrival as pastor, rapid expansion began. The church needed to demolish the house where Bill and family lived, in order to pave additional parking. Just ahead of the demolition, Bill was called to serve as a student minister for the Georgia Baptist Convention. He spent the rest of his career serving Georgia Baptist churches in the education and student ministry. He looks back on Mountain Brook Baptist Church after 58 years with amazing clarity, warmth, and appreciation.



*Bill Williamson, pictured about ten years after he served on staff at Mountain Brook Baptist Church.*



SEPTEMBER 22, 2019

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

## LESTER AND DOT BARKER: POINTING TO JESUS

*Lester Barker was the first full-time minister of music for Mountain Brook Baptist Church, serving 1963–1976, 13–1/2 years. He served Mountain Brook Baptist Church longer than any other music director to date. One of his first innovations was the Living Nativity pageant, immediately after his arrival. He wrote the script with Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr.'s approval and voice. He chose the music from his library of recordings, and he supervised the making of the tape which has continued to bless the community for more than 50 years. The following statement by his daughter explains Lester Barker's deep motivations as a minister.*

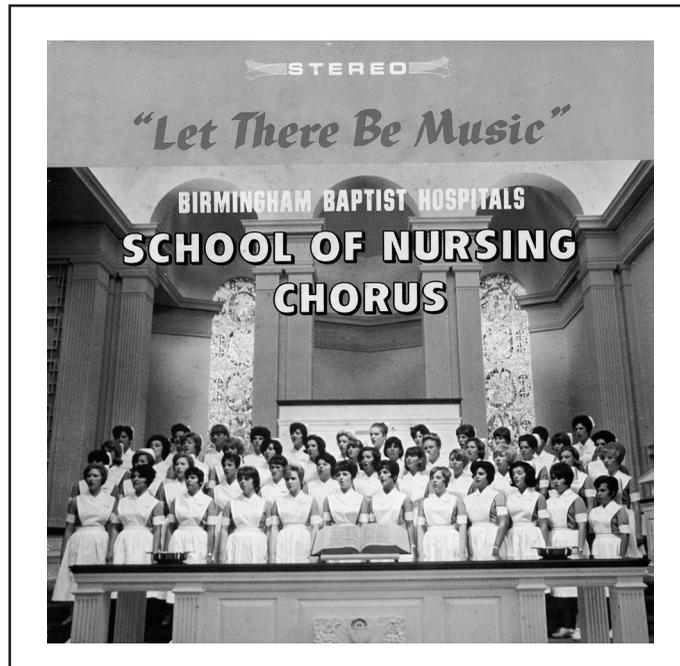
My father struggled with his decision to join the staff of Mountain Brook Baptist Church until during a long prayer session, he felt God move his heart. He had only been the minister of music at Shades Mountain Baptist Church for a few short months. Earlier, he had felt God's nudge when he left his ministry at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church. Now it took more force from God to convince him to change churches. Lester Barker said his heart physically shook with tremors as he prayed for guidance, then he obediently did as he felt the Father leading him to do. Not only did Lester bring his musical ability, but he also brought his wife, Dot Barker, the best organist and accompanist a minister of music and husband could hope for. Together, Lester and Dot Barker served Mountain Brook Baptist Church for more than thirteen years.

My father believed that everyone who came to services should be led to worship the Lord. Every hymn and anthem was to reference and support the topic of the sermon. Everything he did was based in prayer. The music was not a performance for an audience but a way to experience true worship through the Holy Spirit.

He approached everything through prayer. He began and concluded his choir practices with prayer. For years he took the youth on choir tours with several weekly prayer breakfasts before school. He wanted so desperately for everyone to personally know the Lord.

His prayers were genuine and deeply felt. Every Sunday morning, my mother played hymns softly while Dr. Nelson prayed the pastoral prayer. One day her musical selection was a bit different. After the service several people, including Dr. Nelson, asked her who had a birthday that day. It was Lester's birthday. But Lester had no idea that Happy Birthday had been played during the pastoral prayer. When asked why he hadn't heard, he

*In 1966 (or earlier), Lester Barker and Mountain Brook Baptist Church founded a choir for nursing students in the school known today as the Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing at Samford University. He took the choir to perform for civic groups and on a tour. The Mountain Brook Baptist Church Sanctuary and organ were brand new when the choir taped a long-play recording. Dorothy Barker was pianist for the recording and a guest organist was Arlene Phillips. The color photograph on the album cover is the earliest known color interior view of the Sanctuary, and the recording captures the organ in its infancy.*



said that he had been praying.

Lester's life was dedicated to loving the Lord through music. After graduating from Georgetown College in Lexington, Kentucky, Lester served at First Baptist in Cynthiana, Kentucky. This is the church where he met my mother. After seminary he moved to First Baptist in Clarksville, Tennessee, married my mother, who became his organist and taught organ and piano at Austin Peay State College. In Alabama, they served First Baptist Church, Alexander City, 1953–1954, followed by Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, 1954–1962, and Shades Mountain Baptist Church, 1962, in Birmingham. They moved from Mountain Brook Baptist Church to Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis, Missouri, 1976–1979. They returned to Alabama to First Baptist Church of Mobile, 1979–1983, then settled and retired in Birmingham to serve South Avondale Baptist Church.

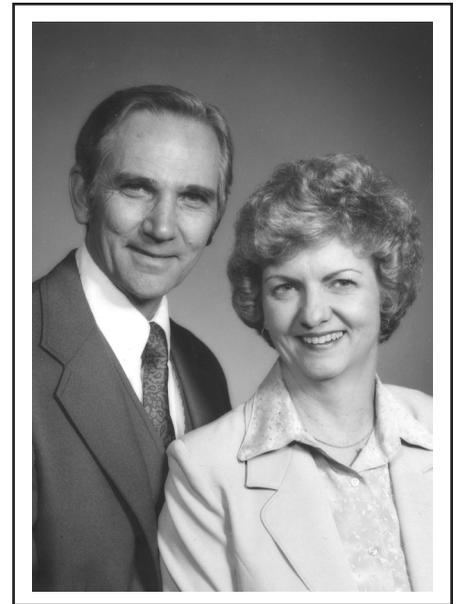
After retiring, they rejoined Mountain Brook Baptist Church, but he always was serving as an interim minister for churches in the area while Dot played the organ at Mountain Brook Baptist 1985–1990 and at Ruhama Baptist until her retirement.

When Dot became ill, she and Lester moved to Knoxville, Tennessee to be near their children. He continually served in interim positions until he was 80 years old. He then began singing programs for assisted living and nursing homes. When he was not conducting music, he was always singing as a member of the choir. When he was 84, his voice was more beautiful than when he was a young man. But his hands shook as he held the music folder and he felt this might make the congregation take their eyes off Jesus. So when he quit singing in February 2010, he said that his life had lost its focus and his heart sorely missed worshipping through song. One month later, our Lord mercifully added his voice to the heavenly chorus so his heart had its purpose once again.

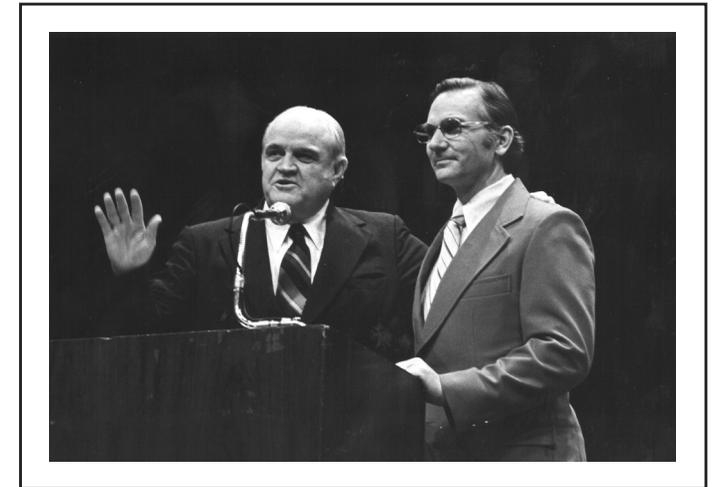
In his retirement statement, Lester said, "The years have been full. Besides developing choirs and singers who presented music to lift, to convict, to praise—causing worship and rejoicing—there were suggestions to relate to others, letting them see Christ in us that they too could relate to Him, that we, as children of God, may not go to Him empty handed."

The epitaph on my parents' gravestone reads, "We would have you see Jesus."

*Minda Barker Cedeno, Daughter of Lester E. and Dorothy Jones Barker*



*Lester E. Barker, minister of music 1963–1976, and Dorothy Jones Barker, organist 1963–1976 and 1985–1990.*



*When Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr. (left) had leading roles in state or national Baptist conventions, he was reinforced by his own chosen music leader, Lester Barker (right).*