

## TREASURES FOR HEALTH

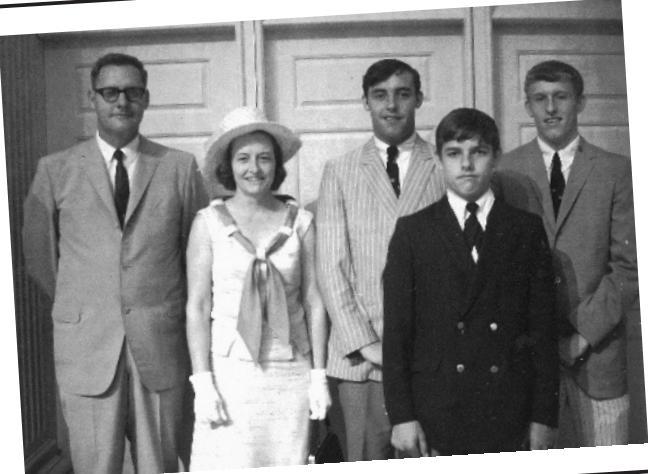
Hidden in a locked corner of the church building is a treasure trove—a room full of home health equipment. A church member with surgery or disability may look there to find just the right device to help recover. Equipment can be borrowed free of charge, as long as needed. And unneeded equipment can be added to the collection.

The collection of health quipment was begun by Margaret Towns. She and her family (including three sons) joined the church in 1968. In April 1987 her husband, Thomas Towns, died after years of sickness. The Towns family had accumulated a lot of home health equipment to aid in his care. Margaret wanted to share these expensive, but helpful treasures as a Christian ministry. She called on her Sunday School Class—then known as the Hope Class—to become sponsors of a Health Closet (as she called it). Margaret was an avid promoter, one who spent years serving as a hospital volunteer.

For the last 32 years, church members and people in the community have been able to use equipment from the Health Closet as needed. Other church members have donated equipment as pieces became available. The Hope Class kept the inventory current by buying new durable equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers, knee scooters, bath chairs, and specialty canes. Even after Margaret Towns was sick and unable to attend church, she directed the Health Closet committee and church staff to keep up the inventory in good repair.

Margaret died in 2016, leaving her son Rick Towns and his family as faithful church members. The Hope Class did not forget Margaret's leadership or the Health Closet ministry. Mary Kate Dyer and Johnnie Bell stepped up to work with church staff. Maintenance staff do repairs and cleaning. Receptionists and all the office staff know what to do, if someone calls in needing a walker, bath chair, or other device. They work with donors offering equipment—sometimes even a lift chair.

At times, the closet grows bare, and the sponsoring class (now known as the Grace Nelson Hope Class) goes into action. At times, there is an excess of equipment. The church has partnered to place the extra pieces through charitable rehab services. Many people in need have been assisted. All people concerned with the Health Closet ministry feel honored to broker this essential, expensive equipment out to places of need. All who knew her honor the generous vision of Margaret Towns.



*Margaret and Thomas Towns when they joined Mountain Brook Baptist Church, pictured with their sons Timothy, James, and Thomas Richard (Rick).*



JULY 14, 2019

## MISS SHARON AND HOW SHE GREW

She's unique. Sharon Howard is the only person ever to be "home grown" into a church staff member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. In this church, she professed faith in Jesus as Savior, and she responded to God's calling to Christian ministry. Serving over 32 years as a church employee, Sharon blossomed into being today's Director of Children and Family Ministries. She has accumulated one of the longest tenures on record.

Her parents, Bob and Wanda Smith, moved to town and joined Mountain Brook Baptist Church when Sharon was in the third grade. At age 11, Sharon attended the Billy Graham Crusade with her church family, and she accepted Christ as Savior. Soon, Sharon and her brother, Lee Smith, joined the church and were baptized. At age 15, Sharon traveled with a church group to the Baptist conference center in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. There she had a life-changing impression—a distinct call to ministry.

Sharon graduated from Auburn University with dual degrees in recreation administration and health and family recreation. She was certified to work with children grades K through 12. During college days, she ran the church's summer recreation program for children. Sharon married Larry Howard in 1998. Though a businessman, Larry has become the beloved ministry colleague known by all the children as Mr. Larry. He also serves as a Deacon.

Sharon began serving as a staff member of the church in 1987, under the supervision of Hoyt Wilson. Sharon helped with administrative work and a variety of ministries. In 1989, she received the title Director of Outreach. That function has undergirded all of her ministry through the years. She loves meeting new people and helping them find places to be involved at the church. Whether helping elder members or children's Vacation Bible School, she became knowledgeable about the people of the church. She is one person who never gets lost in the building—because she grew up along with its changes.

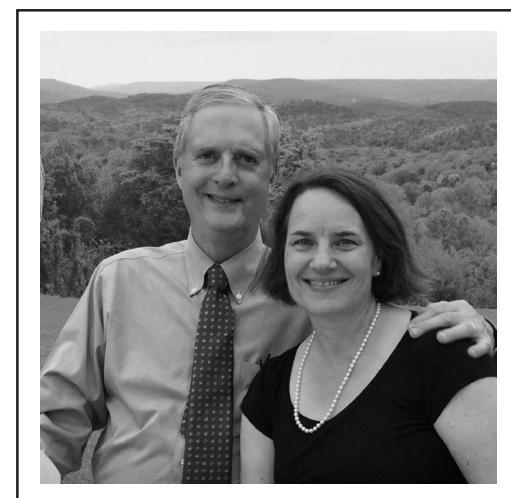
Among the additions to the church family were Lee's wife, Natalie Smith, and then came their daughters Claire and Anna. The grandfather, Robert "Bob" Smith, was chairman of Deacons, and grandmother Wanda was WMU director. Lee also became a Deacon.

Following the retirement of Emma Laura Patrick, Sharon became the Director of Children and Family Ministries in 2007. She continued to develop the work of Vacation Bible School, children's camps, retreats, recreation events, and Bible drill programs. From



Above: Bob and Wanda Smith, with their children Sharon and Lee.

Right: While Sharon is on ministerial staff at Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Larry serves alongside her faithfully as a Deacon and is known as "Mr. Larry" to the children of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Larry attends sporting events, helps set up events, supervises Preteen retreats, and does a lot of behind-the-scenes work for the Children's Ministry and for our church.



2007-2019, some 195 children have been baptized and joined the church.

Sharon developed the concept of family mission projects. The idea was to include all-age members of the family, so that the message of Jesus could be carried to children across the country. From 2009-2019, some 600 people have participated in family mission trips. Fundraising for the family mission projects became a means of team-building and involvement in itself. One of the major fundraising events each year is the family golf tournament, each of which has 75-100 participants and raises \$16,000-\$20,000 for missions. One goal of the experience is to raise children to grow up wanting to give to missions and to do missions all their lives. Mountain Brook Baptist Church families have worked with seven different churches and been able to share the gospel with hundreds of children either through Vacation Bible Schools or sports camps.

One of Sharon's biggest responsibilities is to be the staff liaison to the Early Learning Center. Working with the church's Early Learning Center Board and director, Sharon gives overall direction to the Early Learning Center and helping families to connect to our church. The Early Learning Center is an excellent community ministry and also an outreach opportunity for Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Many families enroll in the Early Learning Center and then become involved in all of the ministries that Mountain Brook Baptist Church offers for the family.

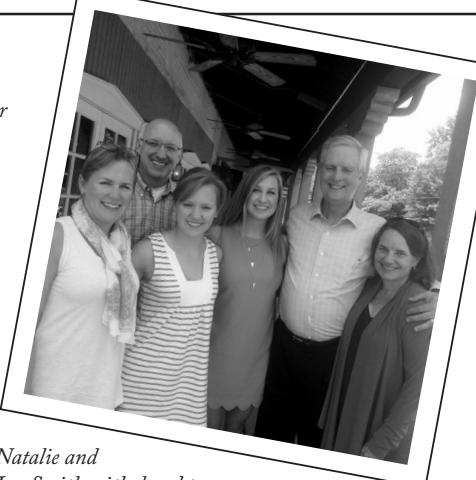
Sharon also helps lead a daily Chapel service for 3K-5K students. One boy went home and said, "Mom, Jesus loves me and He has a plan for me." Then he said, "And Mom, I know how to pray." A child who came from another country told her teacher, "I didn't know Jesus loved me. No one ever told me about Jesus until I came here." Since 2007, more than 3,000 children have spent time in our Early Learning Center.

Countless people have been touched by the ministry of Miss Sharon. For many, she extends the arms of the church to welcome newcomers and to embrace the children with the love of God. Miss Sharon always talks about accepting Christ and becoming a Christian. She always talks with the children about trusting God and following him in their daily lives. Sharon Howard is more than the nurturing organizer of family-child dedication services. She is more than the voice preaching the "children's sermon" in traditional worship services. She lives the example of faithful service to the children she always calls "my friends."

Dr. Alvin Pelton  
Minister of Education 1996-2016



Sharon Howard grew up at Mountain Brook Baptist Church, and has served on our church staff for over 32 years.



Natalie and Lee Smith with daughters Claire Hills and Anna Smith, and Larry and Sharon Howard.