

TOGETHER: Who's going to fill their huge shoes?

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Three great Texas Baptist leaders died in the past few weeks: John Baugh, founder of Sysco and strong Baptist layman; Herbert Reynolds, Baylor University's 11th president; and Ronald Edwards, pastor of Minnehulla Baptist Church in Goliad and president of the African American Fellowship.

At John Baugh's funeral, Daniel Vestal, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship coordinator and his former pastor, described how he believed in the priesthood of each and all believers. He believed America had grown great because of the Baptist witness to religious liberty and our conviction of soul competency in matters of faith.



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His generosity to Baptist causes was legendary. One gift I would mention: He helped bring hundreds of pastors and spouses together for fellowship and retreat. He asked us to tell them: “A Baptist layman believes in you and is grateful for the sacrificial service you and your families give to the cause of Christ. This is a way for a layman to say, “Thank you for all you do.”” That word healed marriages and sent pastors back to their tasks with vigor and dedication.

Herbert Reynolds loved Baylor and Texas Baptists. He believed the future of Texas, as well as the eternal future of Texans, depended on reaching people for Christ; and he believed new churches were a key strategy in helping that happen. He believed strong Baptist churches were a key ingredient also to a strong Baylor future.

He engineered the change in Baylor’s governance formula from the BGCT electing 100 percent of the Baylor board to the convention electing 25 percent and the others being board-elected. He felt Baylor’s future must not rest upon who could win the elections each year at the BGCT annual meeting. Still, he cared deeply for the Baptist witness at Baylor, and he sought to enrich the partnership between Baylor and all the BGCT.

At his funeral, his favorite hymn was featured—“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Ronald Edwards was born, saved and educated in Goliad and Minnehulla Baptist Church. He was raised in a family with deep roots in the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers, many of whom settled in the historic Goliad area. They were gifted cowboys, and many developed ranching and farm operations that still are strong.

In his first year of college, he answered the call to preach and was a leader of Bible studies and campus ministry. For 17 years, he was pastor of the church he grew up in. He led the church to become part of the BGCT. He

led in buying land and building two buildings. He was a passionate advocate for missions and involved his congregation in starting three new churches, including the first African-American cowboy church. The most apt description expressed of this strong leader's life was that he was a "bridge builder."

He gave his life for his people, and it was easy to see how much they loved him at his "Home Going Celebration."

When great women and men die, the question must always be: "Who will take their place?" It will take more than three.

We are loved.

Charles Wade is executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board.

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