

Remembering Baptists who died in 2012

January 12, 2012

(ABP) -Baptist journalists, pioneers in racial reconciliation and beloved leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship were among deaths reported by ABPnews in 2012.

Francis McBeth, an internationally acclaimed composer and conductor and longtime professor of music at Ouachita Baptist University, died Friday, Jan. 6, at age 78.

Mourners attend the January 2012 funeral of Harold T. Branch at St. John Baptist Church in Corpus Christi (Photo by Michael Zamora/Corpus Christi Caller-Times)

Longtime Baptist journalist Jim Newton, 75, died Jan. 16 in Clinton, Miss., after a battle with leukemia. He was assistant director of the Baptist Press in Nashville, Tenn., from 1965 to 1973. After that he worked eight years as editor of *World Mission Journal*, published by the SBC Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn. In 1980 he joined the staff of the Home Mission Board in Atlanta, retiring in 1992 as public relations director to accept a communications position with the U.S. based-office of World Vision International in California. After retiring to Clinton, Miss., Newton worked with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi.

Harold Branch, 92, the first African-American officer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, died Jan. 20 in Corpus Christi, Texas, a community he had served in various capacities since 1956.

Lloyd Householder, 82, a veteran Southern Baptist denominational

worker and communicator, died Jan. 30. Householder worked 32 years for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, now called LifeWay Christian Resources, before retiring in 1992 as assistant vice president for the office of communications. After retirement he served as first coordinator of the Tennessee Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1994-1995.

Melissa Cheliras, 33, Baptist campus minister at the University of Richmond, died Feb. 10, following a four-month battle with esophageal cancer.

Helen Fling, 97, a longtime leader in Woman's Missionary Union, died March 1. The wife of Pastor Robert Fling, she was president of the women's auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention from 1963 until 1969.

Lee Porter, 83, a retired editor at LifeWay Christian Resources who served 25 years as SBC recording secretary, an annually elected post responsible for casting, collecting and tabulating ballots during business sessions of the convention annual meeting, died May 17.

Julian Pentecost, longtime editor of the *Religious Herald* and a founding director of Associated Baptist Press, died May 31 at 87.

John Roberts, 85, the longest-serving editor in the history of The Baptist Courier, died Aug. 15. He joined the Courier staff in 1965 as associate editor and business manager. The following year he became editor, a job he kept until his retirement in 1996. He held leadership positions which included serving on the board of directors of Associated Baptist Press.

Jeff Trussell, 45, and Courteney Kaliszewski, 16, members of Cedar Grove Baptist Church in Maryville, Tenn., died Sept. 16 in a church van accident while returning from a weekend retreat. Tyler Schaeffer, 21, of Sevierville, Tenn., was charged with vehicular homicide and drug possession in the crash that also injured 12.

Henry V. Langford, a white Baptist preacher whose support for racial equality caused him to be blackballed by churches in the 1950s, died Oct. 7 at age 93. Langford served as pastor of small churches in Virginia before he used a weekly column he wrote for the local newspaper to voice support for the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that declared the “separate but equal” doctrine used to support school segregation unconstitutional. Langford was eventually forced to resign as minister at Shockoe Baptist Church in Chatham, Va., and could not find another congregation that would call him as pastor. He found a new calling in the Alcohol and Drug Education Council of Virginia Churches, where he served eight years as associate director and 13 as executive director, speaking to hundreds of school, church and community groups across Virginia about the signs and dangers of substance abuse during the 1960s and 1970s. Langford finally received long-overdue recognition in 2007 when the Virginia General Assembly passed a joint resolution honoring “his commitment to justice and equality for all citizens.”

John Dunaway, 79, a longtime Kentucky pastor who helped name the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, died Oct. 18 at his home in Huntsville, Ala., following a long illness. The Constitution offered at the inaugural CBF gathering proposed the group of disenfranchised Southern Baptists call itself the “United Baptist Coalition.” Dunaway, at the time pastor of First Baptist Church in Corbin, Ky., pointed out that an existing United Baptist group espoused “extreme Calvinist views” and “the identification with the United Baptists would be in conflict with who we are and what we are.” Ed Vick, a layman from Raleigh, N.C., said Baptists, in the truest sense of the word, are not united but rather cooperative. And so the group instead named itself the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — today an 1,800-church organization with headquarters in Atlanta.

Salem Boulos Sweilem, who attended the Gaza Baptist Church in Gaza City, died Nov. 19 of an apparent heart attack triggered by stress during a

nearby bombing that shook his home. More than 160 Palestinians were killed during eight days leading up to a ceasefire announced Nov. 21. Palestinian sources said half were civilians, and about 30 were children. More than 1,200 people were wounded.

K.H. Ting, an Anglican bishop prior to China's Cultural Revolution who led a "post-denominational" re-emergence of Chinese Christianity in the 1970s and 1980s, died Nov. 22 after several years of poor health. In 1985, Ting and others set up the Amity Foundation, a Christian faith-based organization that promotes education, social services, health and rural development across China. Its work includes Nanjing Amity Printing Company, Ltd., a joint venture with the United Bible Societies launched in 1988 that recently celebrated the printing of its 100 millionth Bible.