

# Church-starting leader JV Thomas dead at age 94

September 8, 2025

James Virgil “JV” Thomas Jr., who led Texas Baptists’ church-starting initiatives to new heights, died Aug. 27 in Colleyville. He was 94.

Thomas was born March 13, 1931, in San Benito to James Virgil and Agnes Thomas. He spent his childhood in Shepherd.

He attended East Texas Baptist College, graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a Master of Liberal Arts degree from Southern Methodist University.

In his early 20s, he felt called by God to vocational ministry. He was pastor of Texas Baptist churches in Harleton, Smyrna, Aubrey, Cleveland and Corpus Christi. He also served as the director of missions of the New Bethel Baptist Association.

Thomas joined the Baptist General Convention of Texas staff in June 1969. For the next 24 years, he served as the director of church extension before retiring in March 1993.

Thomas was instrumental in developing creative strategies and innovative approaches to church planting. They included the Key Church strategy—beginning with First Baptist Church in Arlington and its Mission Arlington ministry started by Tillie Burgin—and the development of western-heritage cowboy churches.

He helped recruit and train a new generation of pastors and leaders focused on helping churches start churches to reach every socio-economic, ethnic and language group in Texas.

# **‘Heart and mind’ of Mission Texas church starting**

When BGCT Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr. challenged Texas Baptists to start 2,000 churches in five years as part of the Mission Texas emphasis, Thomas played a key role.

In fact, Pinson called Thomas “the heart and mind” of the Mission Texas church-starting effort.

“His compassion, dedication, innovation, creativity and organizing ability guided the effort to reach the goal of 2,000 new churches,” Pinson said.

Working with State Missions Commission Director Charles McLaughlin and Missions Division Director Charles Lee Williamson, Thomas led the church extension staff “to implement the strategy of reaching the Texas mission field with its rapidly growing, diverse population for Christ, and thereby strengthening the Texas mission base to help reach a lost world for Christ,” Pinson said.

“The BGCT did not start these churches. Existing churches did that. And JV Thomas and staff developed creative ways for Baptist associations and the BGCT to help provide the resources for churches to start churches.

“In so doing, JV wrote new chapters in the story of church planting by Baptists. Only God knows the impact that this has had on making and maturing disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

William Tinsley, former assistant executive director of the BGCT, was among the church planters Thomas recruited.

“Only heaven will measure the influence of this unlikely leader who came from obscure beginnings and ended up spearheading church planting

movements that extended from Texas to the ends of the earth,” Tinsley said.

“We should not be surprised. People like JV Thomas have always been God’s chosen way to work in the world.”

Thomas was preceded in death by his childhood sweetheart and wife of almost 60 years, Lucy Jarboe Thomas, and son Timothy Thomas.

Survivors include his wife, Marion Thomas; daughter Teresa Krimm and husband Mike of Dallas; son Terry Thomas and wife Mary Fox-Thomas of Andrews, N. C.; 11 grandchildren; and numerous great- and great-great grandchildren.

Memorial gifts in his honor can be made to the Texas Baptists Church Starting Fund through the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation at 7557 Rambler Road, Suite 1200, Dallas, TX 75231 or online at [www.missionsfoundation.org](http://www.missionsfoundation.org).