

Obituary: Julian C. Bridges

April 10, 2023

Julian C. Bridges, former missionary and longtime professor at Hardin-Simmons University, died March 20. He was 91. He was born April 3, 1931, in Miami, Fla. At age 10, he and his mother became believers in Jesus Christ on the same day, through the ministry and friendship of his after-school sitter, who began taking him to church. After he graduated from Miami High School, he went to the University of Florida, where he became actively involved in the Baptist Student Union. His experience as a summer missionary to Mexico led to his lifetime of service in Christian service and ministry. After receiving his bachelor's degree, Bridges went to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, where he met and married Charlotte Martin, who quickly became a great partner in ministry and "the delight of his life." During that time, Julian preached, and she played the piano for a small Spanish-language church in Dallas. Their courtship blossomed into marriage in 1954 and the strong bond of partnership and love in ministry continued through the next 68 years together. Upon graduation, the Bridges were appointed as foreign missionaries. They attended language school in Costa Rica, and their family grew quickly with the birth of three daughters. In 1961, the family of five moved to Mexico City. Julian Bridges became the minister to students, overseeing the work in two student centers and a university student Baptist residential home. The Bridges also served at the First Baptist Church of Mexico City and then created a small church, ministering to hundreds of poor children, students and families, until leaving Mexico in 1973. Bridges had received a Doctor of Theology degree in 1958, and while on furlough in



1968, he earned a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Florida. Hardin-Simmons University invited him to join the faculty in 1973, and he began teaching sociology. For several years, he was dean of the department of sociology and social work. After 31 years, he retired from Hardin-Simmons in 2004 and was named professor emeritus of sociology. As a deacon at First Baptist Church, Bridges was a strong advocate for City Light Ministries, an organization serving primarily the Abilene homeless and the poor. Through the decades, Bridges preached at City Light and many area churches in neighboring communities, and he served as interim pastor at Southside Baptist Church. The Bridges enjoyed visiting and praying with people in the hospital each week. One of his most enjoyable tasks was driving the First Baptist Church van to pick up children for Sunday school or Vacation Bible School. Bridges was a licensed marriage and family therapist and worked as a professional counselor through First Baptist Church. He was the author of six books, three of them written in Spanish. One of his last and largest projects in later retirement years was creating the largest pronunciation guide—both in print and audio—of Spanish names for English-Speakers ever produced at the time and marketed it online. In the most recent years, he has served as a bilingual translator for non-English-speaking defendants and inmates in the Abilene District and Federal court system. He was a longtime member of Rotary in Abilene and received its Lowell W. Queen Award of Excellence in 2011. He was elected to the Abilene City Council in 1982, served as mayor pro tempore in 1984-85 and chaired the human relations committee. Over the years Bridges was honored with various awards for civic service. He is survived by his wife of 68 years Charlotte, his three daughters Rebecca A. Bridges, Deborah L. Gil and Marelyn Shedd; and three grandchildren.