

Baptist philanthropist Babs Baugh dies at age 78

June 15, 2020

Barbara Nell “Babs” Baugh of San Antonio, a second-generation philanthropist who supported numerous Baptist causes, died June 14 after a lengthy battle with Parkinson’s disease. She was 78.



Babs Baugh

Baugh was an accomplished musician, a world traveler and a strong advocate for historic Baptist principles.

In 2007, she became president of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation, created by her late parents, the founders of Sysco Corp. With her daughters, Jackie Baugh Moore and Julie Baugh Cloud, she distributed more than \$95 million in foundation grants to multiple Baptist agencies and institutions, including the *Baptist Standard*.

“The Baugh legacy is indisputable, and Babs stands proudly in that legacy. She maintained her parents’ staunch commitment to historic Baptist principles and generous support of historic Baptist institutions—the *Baptist Standard* included,” said Eric Black, editor and publisher.

“Like her parents, she also helped launch new Baptist organizations committed to those same principles, making concrete the idea that Baptist commitments are in service to God’s future. In Babs, we saw and still see what Baptists are at their best.”

Committed to ‘faith freedom’

Because of her deep commitment to religious liberty and separation of church and state, she was a major donor to the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and served on its board.

“Babs was a force—a force of love, tenacity, generosity, humor, spunk, joy and warmth. I count myself fortunate to have known her and loved her,” said Amanda Tyler, executive director of the BJC.

“Her commitment to faith freedom included serving on BJC’s board, encouraging us in the creation of our expanded office space to welcome new groups, and supporting bold ideas. We host hundreds of students each year in the Baugh-Walker Conference Suite to teach them about religious freedom, and having the Baugh name on the door reminds all of us about the importance of investing in the next generation. Her legacy lives on in her beautiful and bold family and all of those she inspired and encouraged through her amazing life.”

‘An iconic figure in Baptist life’

She attended Baylor University, where she studied music. Although she completed her degree at the University of Maryland, she had deep personal and family ties to Baylor. Both of her daughters and three of her grandchildren graduated from Baylor. Her father was a Baylor regent and regent emeritus, and he provided one of the lead gifts that established Truett Theological Seminary.

She was instrumental in creating numerous endowed scholarships at Truett Seminary, in the Baylor School of Music and the Hankamer School of Business, and in establishing the John F. Baugh Center for Entrepreneurship and Free Enterprise.

“Babs Baugh—like her parents, John and Eula Mae Baugh—was an iconic figure in Baptist life and truly a shining example of Matthew 5:16. She let her bright light shine and glorified God through her good works and joyful, generous spirit that supported Baptist causes, the local church and universities and institutions,” said Linda Livingstone, president of Baylor University.

“Every day on our campus, Babs’ and the Baugh family’s love and support of Baylor allows us to carry out our Christian mission in higher education in significant ways: theological education at the Baugh-Reynolds Campus of Truett Seminary; endowed student scholarships in ministry, music, social work, business, entrepreneurship, history and biology; endowed chairs and professorships for faculty to pursue teaching and research that impacts the world and the local church; and the restoration of Baylor’s iconic Tidwell Bible Building, with her gift completing fundraising for this important project that will impact students for generations.”

‘Will continue to bear much fruit’

Through the years, Baylor recognized her with its Herbert H. Reynolds Award for Exemplary Service, the Parent of the Year Award, the W.R. White Meritorious Service Award and membership in Baylor’s Medallion Fellowship and Endowed Scholarship Society.

She and her family foundation were largely responsible for several endowed chairs at Baylor, including the James Vardaman Endowed Professorship in History, the Diana R. Garland Chair in Child and Family Studies in the Garland School of Social Work, and the David Garland Chair

in Preaching and the Foy Valentine Chair in Christian Ethics at Truett Seminary.

“The Baugh family’s legacy and generosity are forever intertwined with Baylor University and Truett Seminary. Thankfully, Babs’ enthusiasm for and dedication to supporting, inspiring and encouraging Truett’s students as they answer God’s call to ministry will continue to bear much fruit both within and beyond the many families, congregations and communities where our students and alumni serve,” said Todd Still, dean of Truett Seminary. “Although we grieve her passing, we give thanks to the Lord for her well-lived life, for which we offer our heartfelt, abiding gratitude.”

Grateful for her ‘eternal legacy’

Abe Jaquez, president of Baptist University of the Américas, likewise expressed appreciation for the many ways Baugh and her family contributed to his institution, noting the school is “saddened by the loss of our friend and kingdom partner.”

“The Baugh family legacy runs deep within BUA. It began with her father, John Baugh, who was instrumental in many significant projects at the school. Babs and her family continued this investment in the university through the years,” Jaquez said.

The BUA academic and administration building in San Antonio is named for the Baugh family.

“Of the many ways she impacted us, her most far-reaching impact is that which she made upon students who are engaging in Christian ministries in communities and nations throughout the world,” Jaquez continued. “We are grateful for the eternal legacy of Babs Baugh and grieve with her family in this time of loss.”

‘An answer to our prayers on many occasions’

Gene Wilkes, president of the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute, noted Baugh was a strong supporter of his institute from its beginning.

“She personally and through the foundation supported us through days when we wondered if we would make it any further. She was an answer to our prayers on many occasions,” Wilkes said.

“But she wasn’t just a philanthropist. She was a friend. Any startup, independent enterprise has to have friends. That’s why we loved her so much. ... She welcomed us into her home and into her family, as if we were one of her own.”

Baugh was in her third term as a trustee of Mercer University. William D. Underwood, the university’s president, said both he and the school “have lost a dear friend.”

“I loved Babs. She was funny. She was fun. She cared about important things,” Underwood said. “She cared about freedom of belief and thought. She cared about the Baptist witness to the world. She cared about making the world a better place. ... Her legacy will extend far beyond her life.”

‘A bright light shining in our world’

Her family’s foundation provided a \$2.5 million grant in 2012 to establish the Eula Mae and John Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership at Mercer, led by Daniel Vestal, former executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

“Babs Baugh was a bright light shining in our world,” Vestal said. “All of us

grieve her death but celebrate the truly beautiful and exuberant life she lived. She was generous, loving and fun. Her influence and legacy for good will extend into future generations. Thanks be to God."

Baugh was a member of the sanctuary choir at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio from 1979 to 2005 and then at Woodland Baptist Church in San Antonio as long as her health permitted it.

In the mid-1980s, she became director of the Sonshine Singers, a San Antonio senior adult ensemble that performed in nursing homes and retirement centers throughout the area, and also traveled extensively. She served as the group's conductor, choreographer and travel agent until her struggle with Parkinson's disease forced her to stop in 2018.

She is survived by her husband of 23 years, John Jarrett; daughter Jackie Baugh Moore and her husband Kim Moore; daughter Julie Baugh Cloud; six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

A private family graveside service is scheduled June 20 in Houston. A memorial service will be planned when large groups can gather safely within COVID-19 public health guidelines.