

# ‘Brother Bob’ ministers to Midland through the decades

June 27, 2025

For more than four decades, almost every patient at Midland Memorial Hospital could count on a visit from “Brother Bob” Porterfield, pastor of West Kentucky Avenue Baptist Church in Midland.



“Brother Bob” Porterfield served West Kentucky Avenue Baptist Church in Midland as pastor more than four and a half decades. He now bears the title “pastor emeritus.” (Photo / Ken Camp)

The COVID-19 pandemic marked the end of his regular hospital visits, but Porterfield—who turns 93 in August—continued to preach regularly until a year ago.

Even after he fell and broke his hip, he delivered sermons from a chair.

“Nothing in the Bible says you have to stand up to preach,” Porterfield said.

After all, Jesus preached sitting down in a boat, he noted.

More than 300 people from throughout the community gathered for

Porterfield's retirement reception recently at West Kentucky Avenue Baptist Church, where he now carries the "pastor emeritus" title.

## **Called 'Brother Bob' even before God's call**

He was born James Robert Porterfield on Aug. 31, 1931, in Plainview. But his father called the youngster "Brother Bob" long before he answered God's call to ministry, since he was little brother to firstborn son David.

"Brother Bob" made his profession of faith in Christ and was baptized at an early age. He felt called to preach during his senior year of high school, and First Baptist Church in Petersburg promptly licensed him to the ministry.

Porterfield practiced preaching while driving a tractor on his father's dairy farm, considering the cows as his first congregation.

However, he never tried to use the cows to practice baptizing.

While he was attending Wayland Baptist University, "Brother Buck" Rogers—a Southern Baptist evangelist—recruited him to preach revival services and plant churches in North Dakota and the surrounding area.

While preaching at First Baptist Church in Wolf Point, Mont., he met 16-year-old Delphie Crause. They married on Dec. 26, 1954.

Instead of throwing rice at the newlyweds, church members tossed snowballs at the couple as he pushed his bride down the hill in a wheelbarrow.

In the years that followed, the couple served small churches around the country. "Brother Bob" served as a bivocational pastor, making his living as

a fruit picker and county surveyor in California, a logger in Arkansas, an insurance agent in Lubbock and bread truck driver in Marfa.

Calvary Baptist Church in Monahans called him as pastor in 1969.

The Porterfields served in Monahans until they moved to Midland in 1976. “Brother Bob” became pastor of West Kentucky Avenue Baptist Chapel, then a mission congregation of First Baptist Church.

## **Faithful ministry to hospital patients**

That same year, he began visiting patients every morning except Sunday at Midland Memorial Hospital. He often distributed Bibles to anyone who was willing to receive one, including the medical staff.

“It wasn’t unusual for him to receive a phone call from the hospital in the middle of the night, and he’d go sit and pray with a patient or family there,” his son Steven recalled.

His son noted “Brother Bob” filled many small notebooks with prayer requests and other information he gathered on his hospital visits.

After the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act—HIPAA—passed in 1996, some of the “higher ups” at the hospital became concerned about patient privacy and were less welcoming of his daily visits and copious notes, Porterfield recalled.

“If the big shots said something to me, I’d just move along to the next floor and keep making visits,” he said.

Porterfield continued his hospital ministry until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions forced him to discontinue the visits.

As an expression of their appreciation to him, many of the hospital staff

participated in a drive-by birthday party for him in 2020, his daughter Ann noted.

## **Salvation in Christ is ‘what it’s all about’**

His children note their mother was an integral part of Porterfield’s ministry and was dearly loved by the community. When she died on March 6, 2004, First Baptist Church made its sanctuary available for her funeral, which drew more than 900 people.

About 10 years ago, one of Porterfield’s children looked through his father’s notes and discovered he had performed at least 1,600 weddings and even more funerals.

Porterfield lost track of how many people he baptized through the years, but sharing his faith and seeing people come to faith in Christ remains his passion.

He speaks wistfully of citywide evangelistic crusades, when churches of all denominations cooperated in events to proclaim the gospel at the local coliseum.

“Brother Bob” cites John 3:16 as his favorite Bible verse. And he expresses concern for longtime friends who still have not professed faith in Jesus.

“I want to see people get saved,” he said. “That’s what it’s all about.”