

Buckner Fanning, a San Antonio institution, dies

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SAN ANTONIO—Buckner Fanning, 89, a welcoming chaplain to the entire city of San Antonio and preacher known internationally for his creative television spots, died Feb. 14, about six months after suffering a major stroke.

Fanning was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio 42 years. At his death, he still was listed as minister-at-large at the Fellowship of San Antonio, a Baptist congregation founded by his son Mike and former Trinity associate Ron Hill.

Fanning began to make a ministerial name for himself shortly after World War II. He had enrolled in the U.S. Marines on his 17th birthday in 1943, survived combat in the Pacific and returned to his native Texas to attend Baylor University.

Fanning participated in the Youth Revival Movement, which began at Baylor and blanketed the South. He honed his warm, conversational preaching style as he deepened his passion for ministry. After graduating from Baylor, he earned a degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Evangelist turned pastor

At the urging of another young preacher, Billy Graham, Fanning founded his own evangelistic association in 1952 and preached revival meetings around the country. Those travels ended in the fall of 1959, when he

accepted the call of Trinity Baptist Church as its pastor.

Fanning presided over the church's integration, as well as implementation of numerous ministries and construction of cutting-edge facilities. The congregation boomed and grew to count 10,000 members.

Meanwhile, Fanning ministered all over San Antonio. Residents of many faiths knew him as an ecumenical leader who welcomed them into the life of the community and worked alongside them to meet its needs.

Fanning grasped the power of television to introduce people to Jesus. He recorded thousands of 30-second TV spots, often in one take, that connected an event or a location or an object to an essential-yet-everyday lesson about God's love.

Representative of Jesus

So, Fanning became the ubiquitous, friendly representative of Jesus in his adopted city. Michael Parker, longtime religion reporter for the [San Antonio Express News](#), explained: "... Fanning never limited his ministry to his own congregation — or to Baptists. He modeled service to the wider community and welcomed anyone and everyone to his church while encouraging Baptists and non-Baptists alike to become more active in their own churches."

During the political/theological battles that divided the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s and '90s, Fanning championed the so-called moderate cause and supported Texas Baptists Committed, which helped the Baptist General Convention of Texas resist the ultra-conservative movement that gained control of the SBC.

Always busy

After retiring at Trinity Baptist, Fanning supported the Buckner Fanning Christian School, now called Buckner Fanning School at Mission Springs, and eventually joined the Fellowship of San Antonio. He also filled pulpits on Sundays for a wide array of Christian congregations.

He is survived by his wife, Martha; sons, Mike and his wife, Harriet, and Steve and his wife, Cecily; daughter, Lisa Fanning Pilgrim, and her husband, George; and grandchildren, Michael Fanning, Avery Fanning, Meagan Fanning, Luke Pilgrim and Julia Fanning Delbeccaro and her husband, Sean.

This article was compiled from multiple news reports, staff experience with Buckner Fanning and information provided by the Fanning family.