

Former BGCT State Missions Commission leader Semple dies

July 23, 2012

James Semple, retired director of the Texas Baptist State Missions Commission, died July 22 at age 80 after a battle with esophageal cancer.

For 12 years, Semple led the commission that included the evangelism, missions, church services and Sunday school divisions of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. During his tenure, Texas Baptists set new records in the number of churches started and people baptized. He retired from the convention staff in 2001.

From 2004 to 2007, Semple served the Baptist Convention of New Mexico, including 10 months as acting executive director and an extended time as interim director of evangelism ministries.

Before joining the BGCT staff, Semple served 25 years as pastor of First Baptist Church in Paris, during which the church had 25 consecutive years of increases in giving through the Texas Baptist Cooperative Program. Semple also previously served churches in Plano, Fort Worth, Mineral Wells and rural Wise County, as well as Ocala, Fla.

BGCT Executive Director Emeritus Bill Pinson characterized serving alongside Semple as one of the joys of his life. He praised Semple's dedication to Christ, commitment to sharing the gospel and service to the Baptist denomination.

"Dr. Semple was a brilliant scholar and a zealous evangelist," Pinson said. "His sermons and writing inspired and influenced a literal army of persons. His loving witness was used by the Lord to usher a host of persons in the Christian family. Heaven is more thoroughly populated because of the life

and witness of James Semple.”

BGCT Executive Director David Hardage reflected on Semple’s impact for God’s kingdom.

“Dr. James Semple, to me, was the epitome of a Texas Baptist,” he said. “I am saddened to learn of his death but know that his life of ministry as a pastor and denominational servant will long be remembered.”

Semple is survived by his wife, Betty, six married children and 20 grandchildren.

Visitation is set for July 25, from 6 to 8 p.m. at Fry-Gibbs Funeral Home in Paris. The service is scheduled for 2 p.m. July 26 at First Baptist Church in Paris.