

Texas Baptist Sunday school leader Bernie Spooner dies

August 14, 2024

Bernie Spooner—considered “Mister Sunday School” to a generation of Texas Baptists—died Aug. 9 in Dallas. He was 89.

Spooner served 22 years with the State Missions Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas as director of what initially was known as the Sunday School Division and later the Bible Study/Discipleship Division.

While on Texas Baptists’ staff, he was instrumental in the early development of Bible study curriculum published by BaptistWay Press, now known as GC2 Press. 

William M. Pinson Jr., BGCT executive director emeritus, said Spooner “exemplified the Christian servant leader in multiple ways.”

“Deeply dedicated to Christ and devoted to the Baptist family, in his quiet, creative, effective way he contributed to the mission of our Lord in an amazing variety of ways. Local churches, Baptist universities and seminaries, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and multiple other entities benefited from his thoughtful input,” Pinson said.

“Serving with him was a joy. He combined leadership and teamship beautifully. Always thoughtful and encouraging, his can-do approach led to success. He took general ideas and goals and fleshed them out into effective ministries. Never flashy but always humbly creative, he had an amazing ability to bring dreams of ministry to reality.

“Deeply devoted to Pat, his wife, the two of them made a winsome ministry team. I thank God for Bernie Spooner and the wonderful contributions he

made to my life and to the lives of multitudes around the world.”

Chris Liebrum, vice president for external affairs at Howard Payne University, served with Spooner at the BGCT, including working directly for him 15 years as youth ministry consultant.

“Bernie Spooner was one of the most influential leaders in my life,” Liebrum said. “In 1985, I went to work for him, and the relationship of boss developed over years to becoming one of my best friends.

“His influence on Christian education has not only touched thousands of Texas Baptists, but has reached all over the U.S. and around the world. If I had a Mount Rushmore, Bernie Spooner would be on it.”

Inaugural graduate school dean at DBU

Prior to serving at the BGCT, Spooner worked 15 years as minister of education and administration at several churches, including Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth. He also served two years as associate professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

After he retired from the BGCT staff, he became inaugural dean of the Gary Cook School of Leadership and professor of Christian education at Dallas Baptist University.

“We were thrilled to have Dr. Spooner join us at DBU after he retired from the BGCT,” DBU Chancellor Gary Cook said. “He was truly a servant leader who inspired us all.”

During his time at DBU, Spooner helped to develop eight master’s degrees and one Ph.D. program, and he was involved in publishing eight textbooks.

Bernard Myrick Spooner was born Oct. 15, 1934, in Pine Hill, Ala., to Earl and Lomie Spooner.

He graduated from Mississippi College with a degree in business and economics. While a student at Mississippi College, he met Patricia Fowler. They married in 1957, and they spent the next few years in Quantico, Va., and Oceanside, Calif., when Bernie was in the U.S. Marine Corps.

After sensing God's call into Christian ministry, he earned a master's degree in religious education and a doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In 2021, the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation created the Bernard and Patricia Spooner Endowed Scholarship to support the staff and ministries of Texas Baptists' Discipleship, an office within the Center for Church Health.

Spooner served two decades as secretary of the corporation for the BGCT.

He was preceded in death by a daughter, Myra Joan Bush, and by his older brother, Bill Spooner.

He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Patricia; a daughter, Jane Spooner Vanderhoef and her husband, David; four grandchildren; and two sisters, Betty Gambino and Jean Bowling.

Visitation will be at 10 a.m. Aug. 17 at Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, with a memorial service following at 11 a.m. Memorial gifts may be made to the [Bernie and Pat Spooner Christian Education Scholarship fund at Dallas Baptist University](#).