

# Kathy Hillman: Texas Baptists' human care—a legacy of ministry

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*“But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand” (Psalm 10:14).*

We quickly followed the nurse as her starched uniform swished and her white shoes squeaked. Girls from First Baptist Church of Eldorado peeked in the room as Elsie Gayer motioned us inside. Standing on tiptoes, we



peered into the bed.

Kathy HillmanThe elderly woman, who seemed 100 to my 9-year-old eyes, reached for my hand. The lady told us how glad she was to meet GAs because she had been a GA, too. As we listened to her stories and shared ours, the years and our fears melted.

That day, I visited my first Texas Baptist hospital, Baptist Memorials Geriatric Center in San Angelo, founded by registered nurse Elsie Gayer. And I learned a new word, “geriatric,” meaning related to the elderly. The years expanded that small facility into Baptist Memorials Ministries, today affiliated with Buckner International’s retirement services that includes the Elsie Gayer Healthcare Center for skilled nursing care.



Elsie Wendt Gayer from the 1926 Baylor University Round-Up. (Image courtesy of the Baylor University Libraries Digital Collections) The years also extended my encounters with Baptist hospitals that care for body and soul, just as Jesus did. Not long after that San Angelo trip, my cousin Mary Kay took her first breath at Hillcrest Baptist Hospital in Waco, and five years later, my cousin Missy made her appearance at Baylor Hospital in Dallas.

Shortly after our marriage, John and I returned to West Texas, where I coached debate in my hometown. One Friday and Saturday, Eldorado students competed in the Hardin-Simmons University Tournament in Abilene. About 1 a.m., I became extremely ill. The doctor at Hendrick Baptist Hospital's emergency room diagnosed a nasty, contagious flu. I couldn't risk the school van. The nurses graciously cared for me until John made the nearly three-hour drive. Eventually, we welcomed our own three children—Marshall, Michael and Holly—at a Baptist hospital, Hillcrest, in Waco.



Kathy Hillman with her newborn daughter, Holly, at Hillcrest Baptist Hospital in 1982. (Photo courtesy of Kathy Hillman) Baptist hospitals began through efforts of individual Baptists, churches and associations. Baylor Hospital treated its first patient in 1904 in a renovated house. It originally was named Texas Baptist Memorial Sanitarium, and R.C. Buckner perceived the need. George W. Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, convinced local citizens to support the endeavor, and wealthy Baptist rancher C.C. Slaughter donated \$50,000. The Baptist General Convention of Texas elected trustees and offered funding.

Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center opened in 1920 as Central Texas Baptist Sanitarium through the generosity of area churches and individuals. Arthur James Barton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waco, cast the vision in



1909.

Central Texas Baptist Sanitarium in Waco construction almost finished in 1920. The name changed to Hillcrest Baptist Hospital in 1938. (Image courtesy of the Texas Collection at Baylor University) In 1912, Waco Baptist Association appointed a committee. With funding secured, the hospital received its charter in 1916 and began construction in 1917. The name changed to Hillcrest Baptist Hospital in 1938, and the hospital affiliated with the BGCT in 1945.

Hendrick Baptist Medical Center's history parallels Hillcrest's. In 1924, West Texas Baptist Sanitarium began through joint efforts of Millard Jenkins, pastor of First Baptist Church in Abilene, and Jefferson Sandefer, president of Simmons University. The hospital later honored major donors Ida and T.G. Hendrick by renaming the facility. Hendrick's relationship with BGCT started in 1935.

Texas Baptists' affiliation with medical centers has shifted with the increasing complexity of health care.



Kathy Hillman's son Michael with children Sawyer, Tucker and Chandler. (Kathy Hillman Photo) Those listed in the 2015 BGCT *Book of Reports* are Baptist Health Foundation of San Antonio; Baptist Health System (San Antonio); Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas (Beaumont); Baylor Scott & White Health, which now also includes Hillcrest; Hendrick Health System; and Valley Baptist Health System (Harlingen). In 2014, these institutions provided more than 9,000 licensed beds, admitted 318,550 patients and treated more than 9.6 million outpatients.

Relationships may differ, but Texas Baptists continue to fund chaplaincy ministry. In 2014, at these medical centers, 175 full- and part-time chaplains, along with 186 volunteer chaplains, made 378,545 visits and conducted 2,664 worship services that saw 349 individuals profess faith in Christ for the first time. The institutions remain committed to "emphasizing excellence and compassion consistent with the healing ministry of Jesus Christ."

I'm grateful for that ministry and that legacy. But John and I are even more thankful for the care our son Michael received as an infant. At age five months, he was admitted to Hillcrest Baptist Hospital's ICU with spinal meningitis. Of the two babies we knew with meningitis, one died and one never recovered. Through those 19 difficult days, professionals competently cared for our son's body. They, along with chaplains, prayed and compassionately ministered to our scared spirits. Today, Michael and his wife, Jennifer, have three children born at what has become Baylor Scott & White.



So thank you, Texas Baptists, for founding, nurturing, supporting and caring for body and soul, just as Jesus did.

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