

# **Dr. Roy Cotton: An equipper of Christians and churches**

May 17, 2021

Dr. Roy Cotton has served Texas Baptists more than 21 years, retiring in 2020 as the director of African American Ministries and continuing to serve as a part-time contractor. From deep in the heart of one Texan, Cotton shares his background and thoughts on the church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## **Background**

**Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?**

I served the Baptist General Association of Virginia over a 21-year period as director of special campus ministries (1978-1994) and director of African American church development (1994-1999).

**Where did you grow up?**

Dallas

**How did you come to faith in Christ?**

I was blessed to be born and reared in a Christian family. My parents led me in making a personal decision for Christ. I was baptized in a small Baptist church in South Dallas when I was 6 years old.

**Where were you educated, and what degrees did you**

**receive?**

- University of Texas at Arlington, Bachelor of Arts in sociology
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Master of Church Music
- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry in Black church leadership

## **About ministry life**

**Why do you feel called into ministry?**

My ministry calling is that of an equipper through denominational service. Through the Holy Spirit, I always have served as an equipper of disciples of Christ who want to know him and make him known.

**What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?**

I love serving churches to equip and enable them in reaching their goals of making disciples and sharing Christ locally and globally.

**What one aspect of ministry gives you the greatest joy?**

Mentoring, or discipling, others so they will mentor others and pass it on (2 Timothy 2:2).

**How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?**

This past year of limitations caused by the pandemic has taught me we have been too dependent on our physical places of worship, rather than making disciples.

Instead of inviting people to our churches, we have learned to take the church to the people, even virtually. Our future will be better, because we

did not let this past year break us. It has brought out the best in us.

My ministry perspective has given me a totally new interpretation of Romans 8:28 and other promises of God in the Bible, such as Jeremiah 32:17—“Nothing is too difficult for you (God).”

### **How do you expect ministry to change in the next 10 to 20 years?**

Ministry will become more inclusive in realizing the contributions of diversity. We have not even begun to tap the vast human resources of combining the talents of collaborative and collective power of disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### **Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your ministry.**

The three most significant challenges of the ambassador program of Texas Baptists are: (1) recruitment of ambassadors, (2) training ambassadors and (3) finding resources to move the program to the next level.

### **What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry or, specifically, your ministry?**

That God can use ordinary people who are willing to discover and utilize their skills and gifts for his kingdom purpose and glory. It is more than a cliché that “God uses ordinary people who are willing” to be used in his service.

The ambassador program is volunteer ministry-based.

## **About Baptists**

## **Why are you Baptist?**

I had the privilege of being reared in a Christian home and brought up in a Baptist church. However, I came to realize Baptists are closer to New Testament Christendom than any other evangelical denomination.

Missions and evangelism, believers' baptism and the eternal security of the believer are some Baptist distinctives that have the most relevancy in why I am a Baptist.

## **What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?**

Baptists are facing the cultural challenges of a post-Christian new world order. We live in a pluralistic society. That does not matter, because we are about missions and evangelism, and we are living in an anti-Christian world, but not of it (John 17:14-18).

We do not condone sin, but we love sinners. Baptists do not witness in our power, but by the Spirit's power and leave the results to God. Our aim is reaching all people with the gospel message. Christ died for all people (Luke 19:10).

## **What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?**

Baptists are committed to missions and evangelism, and our mission field is growing daily. We cannot slow up or back down in showing love and sharing Christ to a lost and dying world.

Think of the potential impact we could have if we set the example for the world in answering issues around racial reconciliation and social justice. Sports, entertainment and other public sectors seem to be more intentional in bridging the great divide.

Diverse individuals make up churches. We are not homogeneous. There is strength in diversity. All have something to offer.

Texas is a salad bowl. There are unreached people groups living here. Hundreds of languages are spoken in the Lone Star State. Texas Baptists worship in 80 languages.

We have opportunities previous generations never imagined. People need the Lord. They need to see unity in our diversity. Let us pray to be the change the world needs.

## **About Roy**

### **Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?**

Among many, there are:

The late Dr. Homer D. Webb Sr., my pastor and mentor. He hired me as one of the church musicians for Griggs Chapel Baptist Church in Dallas when I was only 17 years old. His trust in me at a young age to work with older persons brought out more than musical leadership; it gave me the first opportunity to develop people and professional skills.

The late Rev. Rollin Delap was the director of the Baptist Student Union at the University of Texas at Arlington during my college years. He taught me to hide the word of God in my heart and how to share my faith, and gave me the opportunity to serve in many leadership roles as a college and seminary student through short-term missions, international student ministry, campus choir, fine arts, student executive council, student-led revivals, retreat leadership and much more.

The late Dr. William H. "Bill" Jenkins provided me with the first opportunity

of full-time denominational service with the Baptist General Association of Virginia. I was a year out of seminary and had very little experience, but he trusted me. I learned an infinitesimal amount of knowledge from his leadership and mentorship.

My current mentor is my pastor Rev. Dr. Howard E. Anderson Sr. Words are inadequate to express all he means to me, my wife and ministry. He is my friend and a great man of vision, character and impeccable leadership skills.

I am perpetually grateful to the Lord for allowing me the privilege of having each of these Christian men in my life. I am continually discovering more potential, while God is developing ministry service in my God-called vocation.

### **What did you learn on the job you wish you learned in seminary?**

Everything! I wish seminary had prepared me for people development. Theories and theology have their place in ministry service, but ministers need more than that. Practicums and internships are recommended.

Ministry is much more than scholastic attainment. It is not how lofty one soars in eloquent elocution, but how lowly one is willing to bow down to serve “the least of these” (Matthew 25).

### **What is the impact of ministry on your family?**

I am so thankful the Lord blessed me with a ministry-focused family. My wife is a retired hospital chaplain with Baylor Scott & White Health in Dallas. Our two sons are in full-time service.

Roy II is an organist serving as orchestra conductor on the music and fine arts staff of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas. He has served hundreds of

churches and conventions as an orchestration and engineering producer for major musical projects, including Dallas Symphony Orchestra's "Gospel Goes Classical" in 2018.

Justin has given music leadership experience throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth area, with nine years as keyboardist for Meadowridge Baptist Church in Fort Worth. He is a vocational consultant in social justice community ministry for a parachurch organization serving the Dallas area.

### **Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.**

*Good to Great* by Jim Collins shares insights for moving from mediocrity to reaching one's or an organization's full potential.

*Half Time* by Bob Buford challenged me to move beyond, not just seeking to be successful, but to making the greatest impact by finding significance.

*Reviving the Black Church* by Thabiti Anyabwile enlightened and enhanced some new insights into the richness of my cultural background.

*How to Reach Secular People* by George G. Hunter III created an awareness of the importance of changing old methods to reach a new generation of people for Christ.

*The Multiplying Church* by Bob Roberts Jr. is a great resource for missional churches being challenged to become engaged in multiplying church planting movements and making a global impact.

*Stir Up the Gifts* by George O. McCalep Jr. and *It's Always Too Soon to Quit* by Lewis R. Timberlake are some of my favorite references.

### **What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?**

I have so many favorite verses, but one at the top of my list is Ephesians

3:20—“Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us.”

This verse assures me of the boundless, limitless, unimaginable greatness of the Lord in empowering me for his kingdom purposes for his glory.

## **Who is your favorite person in the Bible, other than Jesus? Why?**

John the beloved disciple is my favorite biblical character, other than Jesus. John wrote the second highest number of books in the New Testament. There is one word found in all five of his writings: *love*.

## **Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.**

My first job was shining shoes in a North Dallas barbershop in Preston Forest Square when I was 14 years old. As a very ambitious worker, I exceeded the expectation of timeliness by riding two city buses from east Dallas to north Dallas every day and arriving one hour prior to the opening time.

## **Share an important story from your childhood.**

I grew up in the 1950s and '60s during segregation and the civil rights era. I had no idea the impact my background would have on my life's narrative.

My first awareness of segregation happened when I was 5 years old. One day during that summer, I was able to go to work with my dad, who was an automobile mechanic. He worked downtown in the Deep Ellum part of Dallas.

Across the street from the auto shop was a hamburger joint. Ah, the aroma of burgers being cooked across the street! I could hardly wait for lunch with that tantalizing aroma.



When my dad and I walked inside the back door, everyone knew him by name. Soon, I began to realize all the people back there looked like us. When I looked up front, the people in front were white.

No one ever had explained the difference to me. Out of my 5-year-old curiosity, I queried my dad as to why people who looked like us were in the back? My dad used much wisdom in his answer, as I later learned to realize.

Seeking to shield me from future negative self-esteem issues, he just sat there and smiled as he answered: "Burgers are better back here son."

Obviously, I was pleased with the answer and continued enjoying that delicious, mouth watery, greasy burger. It really was mmm, mmm good. And life has continued to get better and better.