

Gail Linam: Fostering the discovery of truth

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Gail Linam is academic dean and institutional accreditation liaison for Dallas Baptist University, where she has served since 1988. She also is an active member of First Baptist Church in Arlington.

From deep in the heart of one Texan, she shares her background and thoughts on Christian higher education. 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, and what were your positions there?

Following my graduation from Baylor University, I was a public school educator in the Austin Independent School District. Prior to my tenure at Dallas Baptist University, I had the great privilege of serving 17 years as minister of childhood education at Calvary Baptist Church in Waco. Boys and girls and their parents hold a special place in my heart.

For many years, I was a writer of preschool curriculum for the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville; an author of preschool/children's books for Broadman Press; and a conference speaker for churches locally and nationally, including two weeks annually at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center.

In 2005, I was privileged to serve as president of the Baptist Association of

Christian Educators, culminating with the celebration meeting of the organization's 50th anniversary at Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga. Almost 1,000 Baptist educators comprised the membership of this once strategic organization supporting ministers of administration, education, youth and children in Baptist churches, as well as educators from Baptist colleges and universities.

In 1988, Gary Cook invited my husband Dennis and me to come serve with him at Dallas Baptist University. In that era, few women held strategic administrative leadership roles at the university level. Dr. Cook was a groundbreaker for women.

Throughout the decades to follow, Dr. Cook placed his trust in me and appointed me to serve in various capacities at the DBU. Initially, he appointed me dean of the College of Education, then vice president for undergraduate affairs, and academic dean. Subsequently, I was named provost of the university, serving in that capacity for 13 years.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Waco.

I fell in love with my husband Dennis at Waco High School when I was 15 years old. Since then, we have served the Lord together joyfully.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Columbus Avenue Baptist Church was central in our family's life. Even though my dad had no college degree, the church nominating committee asked him to teach a men's Bible study class because of his leadership and great love of Scripture.

During the day, my dad was a barber shop owner, where he built relationships with countless members of the community. I still can picture my dad, after 12-hour workdays, opening his Bible on the table following

our family dinner to study the Bible passage and prepare for the next Sunday's lesson.

It also was not unusual to hear a knock at the door when a client came by the house to hear more about following Jesus after seeds had been planted at the barber shop.

I was 10 when I gave my life to Jesus at a Billy Graham Crusade in Fort Worth. I felt him very keenly in my life. At times, I would line up my dolls and tell them stories about Jesus. Since Jesus was the Master Teacher, I wanted to become a teacher like Jesus, sharing the good news.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

I graduated from Baylor University's College of Education in Waco. Later, sensing a deep desire to enrich learning at the university level, I earned both my master's and Ph.D. degrees in foundations of education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

About education

Why do you feel called into education?

I experience such pleasure in helping others discover enriched lives through meaningful learning. Whether as a public school educator in Austin, a minister of childhood education at Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, or an administrator at Dallas Baptist University, my deepest desire has been to foster discovery of the truths that help the learner better understand, value and appropriate the riches of the knowledge God brings into our lives through quality education.

How does being a Christian influence your work in education?

True Christ-centered education enriches life and fosters deeper understanding of God's plan for his people in our world. Just like Paul, believers are equipped to share the good news according to their individual callings.

Quality learning brings meaningful, purposeful change in our lives, and in the world around us, as we seek to become all Christ desires for us to be. When I teach, I pray for the Holy Spirit to help me to reflect Jesus and his relevance for daily living.

What one aspect of education gives you the greatest joy?

Discovery! What awe I feel when I experience a bond with learners in discovering new truths about God and this amazing, needy world in which we live. We cannot change the whole world, but we surely can invest deeply in learners, shaping one life at a time, so they can then go out and respond to needs as Jesus would wherever he leads them.

What is your favorite class to teach? Why?

I am dean of the general studies course required for all traditional age students titled "Developing A Christian Mind." Twelve to 13 sections of this course are taught each semester, equipping students to see the world and its challenges with their faith woven into every element of their life experience.

How has your place in education or your perspective on education changed?

I've seen the profound impact of quality, Christ-centered higher education

on the lives of the students God leads to DBU. The administrative abilities of both women and men are much more recognized and utilized today.

Another gifted female Christian educator, Norma Hedin, currently serves as DBU's chief academic administrator in her role as provost. Through her high calling to this role under the leadership of DBU's current president, Adam Wright, God continues faithfully to equip graduates whose influence will reach around the world.

Global vision and outreach are essential for servant leaders called by God to bear witness to Christ in every field.

About Gail

Why are you Baptist?

Certainly, no denomination ever will be perfect models of our Savior. But we forever can be thankful our Baptist founders gave their lives for religious freedom.

I rejoice that the Bible is the source of our truth. Our denomination's long-held commitment to personal as well as collective Bible study and reflection provide individuals and churches with a "solid rock" on which to stand, regardless of this tragic era in our world.

Being part of the larger Baptist family is a spiritual birthright we value at DBU. In DBU's Ford Village, the university houses the Center for Baptist History and Heritage, which helps to introduce faculty, students, staff and guests to the rich heritage that is ours as Baptists.

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

Alma May Scarborough was my Baptist Sunday School Board editor for a

preschool teachers' guidebook for which I wrote annually many years. Alma May's delight in laying a spiritual foundation for babies, creepers and toddlers provided invaluable insights as we created meaningful teaching guides for preschoolers in the church.

Alma May also wrote many songs for young children learning about Jesus. Now deceased, her picture in my home is an inspiration to me every single day. Over the decades she was part of my life, Alma May modeled how to be a life-long learner and possessed an endless capacity to love until the last days of her life.

Another significant mentor in my life is Gary Cook, DBU's chancellor. In Dr. Cook's first chapel address after his inauguration as DBU president in 1988, he utilized a quote from medical missionary Albert Schweitzer to inspire the DBU family to become servant leaders. Schweitzer shared: "I don't know what your destiny will be but one thing I know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." I personally and regularly experience the truth of Dr. Schweitzer's words.

Ultimately, Dallas Baptist University points our students to Christ as the perfect example of One who serves.

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

In the dark days unfolding now across the globe, I've found inspiration from Nancy Koehn's powerful book *Forged in Crisis: The Making of Five Courageous Leaders*. The narrative offers revealing and timely truths from the lives of Ernest Shackleton, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rachel Carson. Each faced crises that ultimately revealed qualities that fortified these historical leaders through difficult times. Their examples elucidate ways in which we may mentor students in

our service as educators.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Philippians 3:14 inspires me. Every day, I pray for the Holy Spirit to accomplish in me the heartfelt commitment expressed in this verse that reads, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Ours is a "high calling." Only our best is good enough in service to the King of kings.