

The Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle



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Tribute: Remembering Bob Ross, Late BFO President, Baptist Leader

by Harve Allen and Bob Nigh

Robert “Bob” L. Ross Sr., one of the pillars of Oklahoma Baptist history who helped lead efforts to advance the Gospel and grow Southern Baptist churches across the state for decades, passed away May 31, 2025. He was 88.

Ross served the Lord in various capacities and ministries throughout his lifetime, including 25 years at The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma (now known as WatersEdge), where he served as the Foundation’s president from 1986 until his retirement in 2002. He also served on various boards with several organizations such as the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO), Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), Southern Baptist Convention Foundation, and Association of Baptist Foundation Executives.

Often described as a visionary, an influential leader, a mentor and a faithful servant, Ross was instrumental in influencing policy for the benefit of charitable foundations. He promoted Foundation services and endowment giving to all Oklahoma Baptists.

He also led the Foundation to greater distribution to Southern Baptist ministries through the growth of managed trust assets, which increased by more than 200 percent to \$200 million during the 16 years he served as president.

In 1995, Ross led the Foundation to establish money management accounts for churches, associations, and other Baptist institutions, and advocated for the formation of a coalition of charities in the state to monitor and encourage charitable giving. This effort eventually led to the passage of three pieces of legislation, including the Oklahoma Charitable Fiduciary Act in 1997 and the Oklahoma Charitable Gift Annuity Act in 1998. Five years later, the Foundation offered donor advised funds for the first time.

Robert Kellogg, who succeeded Ross as president of the Foundation, said the success the organization enjoys today, particularly the number of changed lives and the ministries impacted here in the U.S. and across the globe, came as a direct result of the strong and stable foundation Ross built during his time as president.

“Robert L. Ross was a transformational leader in the history of WatersEdge, establishing the framework and foundation for the ministry services organization we have become. He was proud to be an



Bob Ross



The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma held an open house and ribbon cutting on Nov. 23, 1986 for its new offices in the Baptist Building at 3800 N. May Ave. BFO President Bob Ross is in the front row, center.

Oklahoma Baptist, and he infused that pride into our culture. Bob was a man of high integrity. He was authentic and resolute. While he will be missed, his impact and legacy will live on,” Kellogg said.

Before joining the Foundation in 1977, Ross served as a pastor for Baptist churches in both Oklahoma and Texas, including Ponca City, Round Grove (As a senior in high school); Wilburton, Panola; Drumwright, First and Oklahoma City, Knob Hill.

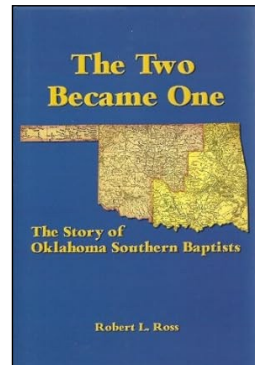
He was also a chaplain for the Oklahoma House of Representatives and Oklahoma State Senate in 1969.

In 1985, Ross authored the book, *The Steps of a Good Man*, a biography of C. Fred Williams, BFO executive secretary-treasurer.

Following his retirement, he served as interim pastor for several Baptist churches in central Oklahoma.

In 2001, Ross was commissioned to write *The Two Became One: The Story of Oklahoma Southern Baptists* as part of the Convention’s Centennial Celebration in 2005. Beautifully written and thoroughly researched, the 416-page book was lauded by BGCO Executive Director-Treasurer Anthony L. Jordan.

“His book is a treasure chest of the people and events that have shaped Southern Baptists,” Jordan wrote. “History is facts, but far



The Two Became One

more than facts. Dr. Ross has shown the struggles, failures, challenges and victories our denomination has experienced. He has introduced us to the men and women who forged on the anvil of time this great denomination.”

Historical Commission member Ron Fannin, retired senior associate executive director of the BGCO, had a long-standing relationship with Ross, whom he called, “My preacher, my boss at the BFO, my friend.”

“As a student at OBU, I began working on the staff with Bob Ross at Drumright, First in December 1968,” Fannin said. “He was a planner, a visionary for the church he served and pushed his staff hard to perform excellence in their work. I am grateful for a mentor like this man as I began ministry. I found him to be an excellent preacher because of the hours he committed to sermon study, preparation and development of his topic for the week. I then followed him to Oklahoma City, Knob Hill, where we worked together for another three-and-a-half years.

“I hope that (Southern Baptists) come away with an appreciation of our heritage, of our history, but I would also hope that we learn from our mistakes. We’re not a perfect people, but we are a people of purpose, and I believe the purpose is holy,” Ross said in an April 1, 2006, interview in *The Daily Oklahoman* about his book.

In one of his final op-ed pieces leading up to his retirement, Ross summed up his time serving as Foundation president using one simple word: fun.

“During the past 16 years, I have been having fun as president of The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma. Although, there have been pressures and disappointments along the way, there has never been drudgery. No day has ever been the same. Each day has brought new opportunities for service and a sense of eternal significance about what the Foundation is doing in providing financial resources for ministry, building loans to churches and estate planning for individual donors,” he said.

Ross graduated in 1955 from Ponca City High School and then attended Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), where he received his Bachelor of Arts in 1959. In 1963, he earned a Bachelor of Divinity from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, followed by a Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary in 1968.

OBU honored Ross with the Joe L. Ingram School of Christian Service Award in 1989 and the Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award in 1993. Three years later, OBU conferred on him the Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.

Ross was named the recipient of the 2017 Distinguished Service Award by the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission at the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society’s Annual Meeting Oct. 7, 2017 at Oklahoma City, Portland Avenue.

20 Years ago Hurricanes Katrina, Rita Devastated U.S. Gulf Coast

By Bob Nigh, Oklahoma Baptists Historical Secretary

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina became an extremely powerful hurricane that caused enormous destruction and significant loss of life. It was the costliest hurricane to ever hit the United States, surpassing the record previously held by Hurricane Andrew in 1992. In addition, Katrina is one of the five deadliest hurricanes to ever strike the United States. In all, Hurricane Katrina was responsible for 1,833 fatalities and approximately \$108 billion in damage (un-adjusted 2005 dollars).

On Aug. 23, 2005, a tropical depression formed over the southeastern Bahamas, becoming Tropical Storm Katrina on Aug. 24 as it moved into the central Bahamas. The storm continued to track west while gradually intensifying and made its initial landfall along the southeast Florida coast on Aug. 25 as a Category 1 hurricane with winds of 80 mph. After moving west across south Florida and into the Gulf of Mexico, Katrina intensified rapidly and attained Category 5 status (with peak sustained winds of 175 mph) as it moved northwest on Aug. 28. Katrina weakened to a Category 3 before making landfall on Aug. 29 along the northern Gulf Coast, first in southeast La. (sustained winds: 125 mph) and then made landfall once more along the Mississippi Gulf Coast (sustained winds: 120 mph). Katrina finally weakened below hurricane intensity late on Aug. 29 over east central Mississippi.

The damage and loss of life inflicted by this massive hurricane in Louisiana and Mississippi was staggering with significant effects extending into Alabama and the western Florida panhandle. Katrina was one of the most devastating natural disasters in U.S. history.

While approaching the Gulf Coast on Sun., Aug. 28, the storm turned to the north toward southeastern Louisiana. The loss of life and property damage was heightened by breaks in the levees that separate New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain. At least 80 percent of New Orleans was under flood waters on Aug. 31.

Less than a month after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast region, another even-more-powerful storm—

Hurricane Rita—struck the area. Rita was the most intense tropical cyclone on record in the Gulf of Mexico, surpassing Katrina, and the fourth-most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded. Part of the record-breaking 2005 Atlantic hurricane season, which included three of the top 10 most intense Atlantic hurricanes ever recorded (along with No. 1 Wilma and No. 7 Katrina), Rita was the 17th named storm, 10th hurricane, and fifth major hurricane of the 2005 season.

Rita formed near The Bahamas from a tropical wave on Sept. 18, 2005 that originally developed off the coast of West Africa. It moved westward, and after passing through the Florida Straits, entered an environment of abnormally warm waters.



Moving west-northwest, Rita rapidly intensified to reach peak winds of 180 mph, achieving Category 5 status on Sept. 21. However, it weakened to a Category 3 hurricane before making landfall in Johnson's Bayou, La., between Sabine Pass, Texas and Holly Beach, La., with winds of 115 mph. Rapidly weakening over land, Rita degenerated into a large low-pressure area over the lower Mississippi Valley by Sept. 26.

In Louisiana, Rita's storm surge inundated low-lying communities along the entire coast, worsening effects caused by Hurricane Katrina less than a month prior, such as topping the hastily-repaired Katrina-damaged levees at New Orleans. Parishes in Southwest Louisiana and counties in Southeast Texas where Rita made landfall suffered severe to catastrophic flooding and wind damage. According to an Oct. 25, 2005 Disaster Center report, 4,526 single-family dwellings were destroyed in Orange and Jefferson counties located in Southeast Texas.

Major damage was sustained by 14,256 additional single-family dwellings, and another 26,211 single-family dwellings received minor damage. Mobile homes and apartments also

sustained significant damage or total destruction. In all, nine Texas counties and five Louisiana Parishes were declared disaster areas after the storm. Electric service was disrupted in some areas of both Texas and Louisiana for several weeks. Texas had the highest total of deaths from the hurricane, where 113 fatalities were reported, 107 of which were associated with the evacuation of the Houston metropolitan area.

After Katrina stormed ashore, the National Guard was called in to help with evacuations. Thousands of people sought refuge in the New Orleans Convention Center and the Superdome, which became overwhelmed. It was one of the largest diasporas of a population since the Great Depression, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). According to The Data Center, an independent research organization in New Orleans, the storm displaced more than 1 million people in the Gulf Coast region.

After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry's office asked BGCO officials to prepare the Falls Creek Baptist Conference Center near Davis to receive as many as 3,000 evacuees for an extended stay.

Hundreds of individuals and churches responded to make the campgrounds ready for guests. Federal officials eventually decided not to send the evacuees, but, as a result, the State Department of Emergency Management saw how well Oklahoma Baptists could respond, and assured the BGCO that it would be on the front line if a similar need ever occurred again.

Oklahoma Baptists made a major impact on the hurricane-stricken areas by serving 12,244,176 meals, delivering 18 trailer and five semi loads of resources, completing 15,422 chainsaw and mud-out jobs, volunteering 77 office days, providing 86,027 showers, doing 21,278 loads of laundry, and purifying 21,595 gallons of water. Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) disaster relief totals also were unparalleled, with 14 million meals prepared in the hurricane zone, and more than 16,000 homeowners receiving chainsaw and mud-out assistance.

Oklahoma Baptist churches and individuals gave more money than ever before, almost \$2 million, to Disaster Relief ministry in 2005. Because administrative costs are covered by Cooperative Program funds, 100 percent of the gifts pro-

vided direct relief to the individuals and churches impacted by the disasters.

Hurricane Katrina: An American tsunami

As BGCO disaster relief director Sam Porter watched radar images of Hurricane Katrina on television as it approached the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, 2005, memories of tsunami-stricken Southeast Asia about eight months earlier flooded his mind.

“As I saw it happening, I couldn’t help but believe that a storm surge of 20-40 feet would be disastrous,” he said. “That was exactly the amount of water that hit Indonesia in December. The difference is we didn’t have a 9.0 magnitude earthquake in the Gulf of Mexico like what occurred in the Indian Ocean, but then Southeast Asia didn’t have sustained winds exceeding 140 miles per hour for several hours like Katrina produced, either.”

Porter shuddered as he spoke, remembering the sights, sounds and smells of death and destruction he witnessed in Banda, Aceh, Indonesia in early January.

“This (Katrina) is an American tsunami,” he stressed. “This is very similar to what happened in Indonesia. All over the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, there’s nothing left but the concrete slabs of homes and businesses, and in some places, the slabs have been torn up because of the huge column of water. You can tell the land mass has backed up. Katrina moved what used to be the coast several yards, maybe several hundred yards, in places.”

Similarly, one full kilometer (.6-mile) of land disappeared at the northern tip of Banda, Aceh when the tsunami hit.

Porter moved quickly over the weekend of Aug. 27-28 as Katrina approached New Orleans and environs to assemble feeding and chainsaw teams to respond immediately after the storm hit land. A 21-person feeding crew from the Oklahoma City area left for a staging area in Marshall, Texas on Aug. 29, followed by a 17-person chainsaw team from Bartlesville the next day. The Oklahomans were assigned to go to Florida Boulevard Baptist Church of Baton Rouge to set up operations.

Disaster relief chaplains were called up by BGCO chaplaincy specialist Paul Bettis to accompany the teams in Louisiana. A total of 41 chaplains eventually ministered in the area.

The Oklahoma kitchen was set up the evening of Aug. 30, and volunteers awoke early on Aug. 31 to begin preparing lunch for that day. The Oklahoma kitchen arrived on site prepared to hit the road running with enough supplies packed into two semis to prepare approximately 35,000 meals.

"Local officials asked us to be ready to cook 20,000-30,000 meals per day," Porter said. "We'll prepare thousands of meals that will be trucked to the refugee shelters, and will feed several thousand people in lines at the church, also."

Tens of thousands of displaced residents of New Orleans had gathered at



sites in Baton Rouge, including Istrouma Baptist Church, and in Lafayette, La., where the 13,500-seat Cajundome on the campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette had been readied as a refugee center. On Aug. 31, officials in Houston, Texas prepared the Astrodome to house almost 25,000 storm refugees.

Because damage was relatively minor in Baton Rouge, the Oklahoma chainsaw team relocated on Aug. 31 to Covington, La., north across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans, where it was to meet up with the No. 1 feeding unit from Louisiana. Porter said the huge number of displaced persons, estimated as high as 2 million by some officials, would provide an opportunity for area churches to reach out.

Porter said the damage done by Katrina already had topped that caused by the previous fall's onslaught of hurricanes which sliced through Florida and the Eastern Seaboard.

"And, we're still early in the hurricane season," he cautioned. "There's already the possibility of another one 5-10 days out right now (which became Rita). This will be the costliest and longest recovery of any natural disaster in the United States. It may be Southern Baptists' longest response, too."

700 attend disaster relief training Oct. 1, 2005

In the wake of the hurricanes on the Gulf Coast, the OSBDR volunteer rolls began to swell. Approximately 700 people showed up for a statewide disaster relief orientation at Henderson Hills Baptist Church of Edmond on Oct. 1, 2005, effectively doubling the number of trained volunteers registered with the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

The training day included a basic introduction to disaster relief led by Porter and instruction in several specialized areas, including feeding, maintenance, inventory control, chainsaw operation, childcare, shower/laundry trailer, water purification and medical.

The statewide disaster relief training in the Oklahoma City area normally was held at Boys Ranch Town (BRT) in Edmond, but State training director Norman Wagoner was forced to change locations when calls began pouring in from interested volunteers across the state. Interest in disaster relief had been heightened during the past year, which had seen four hurricanes hit Florida and the U.S. East Coast, an earthquake and tsunami strike Southeast Asia and hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastating Louisiana and Mississippi and also affecting Alabama and Texas.

As of Oct. 5, 30 state conventions had responded to the aftermath of Katrina and Rita. The total number of units activated was 342. Volunteer Days totaled 64,986, with 6,087,549 meals prepared. Chainsaw/recovery units had completed 7,022 jobs, and 37,920 showers had been provided, 7,568 loads of laundry done, 2,460 messages sent, and 5,391 children cared for. Oklahoma had feeding, chainsaw and shower units serving at Belle Chasse, La., located on the outskirts of New Orleans.

OSBDR crews combined their operations, moving from Florida Boulevard Baptist Church of Baton Rouge, La., to First Baptist Church of Belle Chasse on Sept. 13. The Oklahoma feeding and chainsaw recovery teams were reunited for the first time since they were the first teams to set up operation after Katrina roared through the Gulf coast area on Aug. 29. The chainsaw team had been working in Covington, La.

Oklahoma's No. 1 feeding unit had prepared a total of about 64,000 meals for hurricane and flood victims as of Sept. 8, according to Dean Kiser of Arcadia, the Blue Cap in charge

of the Oklahoma City-area crew in operation at Florida Boulevard Baptist Church. The kitchen eventually prepared a total of 71,203 meals while in Baton Rouge.

The Oklahoma kitchen was the first disaster relief kitchen to be mobilized into the immediate New Orleans area. Belle Chasse is located on the southeast edge of New Orleans, on the west bank of the Mississippi River. The feeding and chain-saw teams were joined in Belle Chasse by a shower trailer constructed by volunteers from First Baptist Church of Chandler.

“Officials had been feeding about 3,000 people in that area using MREs (Meals Ready to Eat),” Porter said. “I know once the word gets out that hot meals are being cooked, the number of meals our kitchen serves each day will probably double at least.”

Porter was asked by Southern Baptist Convention disaster relief coordinators to activate another shower trailer—actually a converted mobile home—on Sept. 14 to serve at First Baptist Church of Slidell, La. The trailer contained 10 shower stalls and a washer and dryer for laundry services.

BGCO Finance Team leader Kerry Russell reported that through Sept. 13, Oklahoma Southern Baptists had donated \$430,000 to Hurricane Katrina relief. Affected evacuee families working through Oklahoma churches were eligible to receive up to \$500 each from those donations. As of Sept. 27, more than \$1.1 million had been donated for hurricane relief efforts by Oklahoma Southern Baptist churches and individuals, Russell said.

As a result, the BGCO wired relief funds to some of the affected areas. A total of \$300,000 was sent to the Louisiana Baptist Convention; \$150,000 to the Mississippi Baptist Convention and \$100,000 to New Orleans Seminary.

“To say these conventions and our seminary are in dire straits after two hurricanes would be a great understatement,” said BGCO Executive Director-Treasurer Anthony Jordan. “We are grateful to Oklahoma Baptists to be able to help our brothers and sisters in need.”

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame

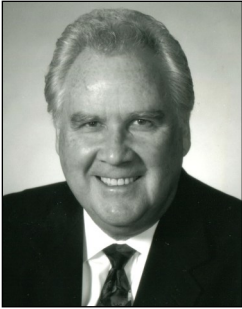
John R. Bisagno

1934—2018

Inducted 2025

by Jack Gallemore, Member OBHC

John R. Bisagno was born in Augusta, Kan. on April 5, 1934 to Jay and Clair (Reese) Bisagno. He graduated from high school in Perry when the family moved there in 1947.



John Bisagno

He played trumpet in jazz dance bands during his high school and college years. Later, he teamed up with a professional Dixieland band during a summer break one year, and between a couple of gigs, he headed home to Perry to visit his parents. There, he ran into his pastor from his hometown and the pastor invited a skeptical teenage John to attend youth camp at Falls Creek Baptist Conference Center near Davis, the largest youth camp in Oklahoma.

At 18 years old, he became a Christian under the preaching of Charles Forbes Taylor. That simple invitation would change the course of his life forever. At Falls Creek on a Friday evening in August 1952, surrounded by 12,000 other campers, Bisagno responded when Taylor invited campers to accept Jesus as their Savior and urged, "I don't care how few come tonight, I want you few to mean business."

John recalls being the first one to walk down the aisle. A preacher greeted him to pray and Bisagno gave his heart to Christ, recalling that, "I got up from my knees the happiest person in all the world."

He then went on and graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) in Shawnee in 1955 with a bachelor of music degree. While in his last year at OBU, he became the minister of music and of education at Sallisaw, First. Shortly thereafter, he left to become a full time evangelistic singer.

Bisagno joined evangelist Hyman Appleman as music director from 1957-1959. In May 1959, he surrendered his life to preaching during an evangelistic crusade in Belfast, Ireland. Eventually, he conducted more than 500 revivals in 37 states and 10 countries as both a musician and preacher.

In 1964, he began a 15-minute radio program called "The Hour of Destiny" which aired on a Tulsa radio station every Sunday.

Bisagno came in view of a call to become the pastor of Del City, First Southern on March 15, 1965. In one interview, he said that an evangelist is similar to an obstetrician in that you see a new birth in Christ. However, he wanted to be like a pediatrician to watch those new Christians grow and mature.

While at First Southern, membership more than tripled from 1,400 to 4,300. Under his tenure, the church had the eighth largest Sunday School in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Training Union in the state of Oklahoma, their music ministry went from five choirs to 14 with one of the largest youth choirs in the nation, and received 1,800 new members through baptism and another 2,000 by letter.

In 1970, John became pastor of Houston, First and moved his wife and three children there. During his 29-year ministry in Houston, the congregation grew from 400 to 22,000 members. During that period, the church also baptized 15,000 people, gave \$250 million to missions, relocated from downtown to its current location in west Houston and helped launch the Bible teaching ministry of Beth Moore.

As a condition of his move to Houston, longtime friend Jimmy Draper said, Bisagno asked Houston's First to pledge financial resources toward the Spireno—an acronym for "spiritual revolution now"—evangelistic campaign. The campaign involved assembly programs with evangelist Richard Hogue at 45 Houston middle schools and high schools followed by rallies with Gospel preaching. The campaign concluded with two and a half weeks of revival services at Houston, First and the Sam Houston Coliseum.

The result: 4,011 professions of faith, BP reported in 1971.

Bisagno's support of women's ministry also was a hallmark of his pastorate. Draper recalled receiving a call from Bisagno in the 1990s about Moore's women's Bible study at Houston, First.

"She's really going to be good," Bisagno said. Eventually, LifeWay signed a contract with Moore, and "she's been by far the biggest author in terms of sales that we've had," Draper said. Additionally, Bisagno encouraged the ministries of women's author and speaker Jaye Martin and Carole Lewis, who helped launch the First Place 4 Health program of weight loss and healthy living.

“Bro. John empowered women in ministry,” Lewis wrote in a Facebook post. “Beth Moore, Jaye Martin and I were allowed and encouraged to pursue the calling God had on our lives. He was our greatest encourager and friend. His influence will be felt for centuries.”

After leaving the pastorship in Houston, Bisagno went on to promote another lasting legacy for Oklahoma Baptists. Falls Creek played an important role in his life. He was saved at Falls Creek in 1952, and returned to preach at Falls Creek in 1967, 1970, and 1975. So, it was no surprise that he and his wife, Uldine, served with many other dedicated Christians on the Falls Creek Leadership Team beginning in 2000.

This effort was approved by Oklahoma Baptists so Falls Creek could be modernized and updated. John traveled across the state each week and spoke to Oklahoma Baptists, who were successful in raising enough funds for the “For the Sake of the Call” campaign and the auditorium of the new tabernacle now bears his name for his efforts.

Bisagno authored more than 25 books, including *Crusade for Christ Melodies, A Change of Heart, and The Power of Positive Praying*.

President of the SBC Pastors’ Conference in 1972, he also served as President of the Oklahoma Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists and as Vice President and President of the National Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists.

Bisagno was a frequent preacher at state Baptist evangelism conferences and the Pastors’ Conference. In 1990, he began supporting publicly the SBC’s Conservative Resurgence and nominated Morris Chapman for convention president.

Draper said “He really was the leader in evangelism and soul winning and strategizing how to win people to Christ and create a culture where people were excited about seeing others saved.”

John Bisagno passed away at the age of 94 on Aug. 5, 2018.

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame Willa Ruth Garlow

1929—2018

Inducted 2025

Willa Ruth Scantlan Garlow was born on July 1, 1929 in Oklahoma City, the daughter of Samuel William and Naomi Ruth Scantlan. She graduated from Capitol Hill High School and continued her education at Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), where she graduated with a degree in Early Childhood Education. She later attended Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

When she married the love of her life, John Lyle Garlow, she entered into what she considered her most important roles—wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.



Willa Ruth Garlow

As longtime and faithful members of Oklahoma City, Capitol Hill, Willa Ruth and Lyle tirelessly served the Lord and others. Willa Ruth dedicated her life to positively influencing the development of young minds, their lives and their personal relationships with Jesus. She served as a motivational speaker and childhood specialist and was a keynote speaker and seminar leader in 34 states as well as Europe, Asia,

Africa and South America.

She was a well-known author of curriculum, materials and articles for Lifeway Publications and for various other periodicals. She authored four books: *Outreach for Preschoolers; My Church; Jesus Is A Special Person and Sharing God's Love and Joy-52 Devotional Bible Studies for Senior Adults*.

In 1980, she was presented OBU's Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award and was later awarded the Distinguished Service Award in 2003 by the faculty of the School of Educational Ministries at Southwestern Seminary. In 2014, Willa Ruth received an honorary Doctor of Religious Education degree from OBU.

"Willa Ruth Garlow was an amazing lady," Oklahoma Baptists' executive director-treasurer Anthony Jordan said. "An incredible preschool conference leader and inspirational speaker, she lighted up every room she entered. She had a passion for life and zeal for serving her Lord. A few minutes in

her presence and you would walk away feeling 10 feet tall. She and Lyle were two treasures of Oklahoma Baptists. They gave their lives in service to our Lord and Oklahoma Baptists.”

In 2018, OBU relocated the offices of Student Life and Spiritual Life to a central location on the first floor of the Geiger Center, moving into the newly renovated Dick and Sue Rader Office of Student Life and Women of Vision Center for Spiritual Life. As part of the renovation, members of the Garlow family, longtime supporters of OBU, generously gave to create the Drs. Lyle and Willa Ruth Garlow Conference Room. The Garlow's children, Warren and Dawne (Garlow) Pybas, '73; and Sam, '76, and Becky (Vickrey) Garlow, '76; and grandchildren, provided the gift in memory of Lyle, '50, and Willa Ruth Garlow, '50, who were deeply invested in OBU as students and throughout their lives of service to Oklahoma Baptists and beyond.

“OBU's mission to transform lives was important to them,” Sam Garlow said, “and this conference room, in the heart of OBU's Student Life Center, honors their love, commitment and service to OBU. Our parents clearly recognized the impact OBU had on

them, their family, and the world. Both Lyle and Willa Ruth had a heart for missions and had multiple opportunities for international service. Throughout their lives, they experienced firsthand the impact of OBU across our state, our nation and our world by preparing laypeople, pastors, church staff and missionaries for lives of service to Christ.”

“As important as her roles as a childhood specialist, author and motivational speaker were...mother considered her most important roles to be wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother,” said daughter Dawne Pybas. “She loved her



Willa Ruth Garlow accepts an honorary Doctor of Religious Education degree from OBU President David Whitlock in 2014.



Retired Oklahoma Baptists' executive director-treasurer Anthony L. Jordan: "Willa Ruth had a passion for life and zeal for serving her Lord. A few minutes in her presence and you would walk away feeling 10 feet tall. She and Lyle were two treasures of Oklahoma Baptists.

family well!

"There are so many things that mother would remind us about if she were here today. The following four are at the top of the list and were evident in her life.

1. Whenever you are in the presence of a child, you are teaching. (The question is—What are you teaching?) She felt called by God to share with churches across Oklahoma and America that teachers must be intentional about teaching Bible truths to children at their level of understanding.

2. It is never wrong to say, "I care." Even when she did not know exactly what to say to a hurting friend, family member or even a stranger, she expressed care and concern, and she listened.

3. Never stop learning! She was a voracious reader who was knowledgeable about new research findings on child development and how children learn. She never stopped learning!

4. Be somebody who makes everyone feel like somebody. She had the ability to make anyone to whom she was speaking feel important and special. She listened intently, she remembered people's names, and she often followed up conversations with written communication. She made everyone feel like somebody.

Willa Ruth Garlow passed away at the age of 89 on Feb. 19, 2018.

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame

Deborah Jo Inda Lipscomb

1951—2018

Inducted 2025

by Richard E. McCullough, former OBHC member

Deborah (Debbie) Jo Inda Lipscomb was born Sept. 26, 1951, in Bartlesville to Joe and Beleva Lee Roberson Inda and raised in Dewey. Graduating from Dewey High School in 1969, she attended Central State College (CSC—now the University of Central Oklahoma—CSU), in Edmond, graduating in 1972 with a degree in Political Science.



Debbie Lipscomb

While attending CSU, she was actively involved in leadership, missions, and outreach through the Baptist Student Union (BSU—now BCM). Debbie served with John Burns as his secretary and later as his assistant BSU director at Central State College.

In 1980, she received her Master of Religious Education degree from Midwestern Seminary and her Doctor of Ministry in the mid-1990s.

Debbie accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior at age 5 while attending Falls Creek Baptist Assembly. She married Bobby Lipscomb on Aug. 12, 1972, and although raised in a Methodist home, had become a

Southern Baptist upon their engagement. To this union, three children were born: Bobbye Jo, Micah Brandon, and Casey Lee, followed by seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

After graduation from Midwestern Seminary, Debbie served as full-time director of the BSU at Rose State College for four years. She then served 15 years as co-BSU director with Bobby at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M in Miami. Debbie completed her career as co-director with Bobby at the BSU at Northeastern State University (NSU) in Tahlequah.

While at Tahlequah, Debbie received the prestigious award as an NSU Centurion for her contribution and influence



Northeastern Oklahoma State University was one of 12 colleges and universities honored by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) for the number of missionaries mobilized in 2005. Donald King, left, from NAMB, presents the award to Baptist Collegiate Ministries directors Debbie and Bobby Lipscomb. NEOSU sent 16 missionaries who qualified under NAMB guidelines.

on students and faculty on the campus.

In addition to her service in BSU ministry and planning committees, she also served the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO) by leading or co-leading more than 200 local, state, and overseas mission trips. Under Debbie's guidance and love for missions, the BCM at NSU led the nation in sending out the most student missionaries for several years. Whenever disaster struck, the BCM students at NSU led by Debbie and Bobby were actively involved helping those afflicted, including the May 2011, tornado that devastated Joplin, Mo., and the May 2013, tornadoes in Moore, to name just a few.

Debbie also had a passion for reaching out to those who came as strangers to a new country, culture, language, belief, food, and manner of living. She worked diligently with NSU's international department in providing events, programs, Bible studies, and trips to meet the international student's needs.

A project named Partnership Ministry was started to involve international students in a lifestyle of Christian ministry. As Debbie and Bobby engaged in many overseas mission trips, that gave impetus to their love for students from any nation.

In January 2011, Bobby and Debbie were recognized, by the BGCO during employees' "At Home" week, with an award for their 30 years of service to the BSU/BCM at NSU at Tahlequah.

While at Tahlequah, Debbie was also the secretary of Blue Star Mothers of Tahlequah OK-21 for several years. Blue Star Mothers of America is a private organization that provides support for mothers who have sons or daughters in active service in the U.S. Armed Forces or who have been honorably discharged. She was instrumental in completing the paperwork to get the chapter sanctioned and provided assistance with counseling members as a good listener, and problem solver, as well as sharing her faith in the Lord.

She served as interim director of Camp Nunny Cha-ha for several summers, assisted with Camp Hudgens (Royal Ambassadors) camp and later, missions camp with Bobby. In her service to the Lord, she found time to serve several roles in the Oklahoma Baptist Disaster Relief Team as a chaplain, assessor, and member of a feeding unit and mud-out unit.

Debbie was a humble, strong, intelligent, passionate, and patient woman who could find the best in any person and who would reach out to others, demonstrating her strong Christian trait of servant leadership. She was consistent in character and conviction and her kindness was used by the Lord to rescue many college students.

Debbie Jo Inda Lipscomb followed her Lord's direction and served with love, enthusiasm, and devotion throughout her life in college campus ministry through what we call today Baptist Collegiate Ministry, influencing countless numbers of students and adults for the Kingdom of Christ. This influence has been handed down through generations of her family and students, creating a legacy of love for our Lord Jesus Christ that Debbie so passionately exemplified.

Debbie was diagnosed with brain cancer in 2014, and was confined to rest at home in Tahlequah. She passed away on June 27, 2018, succumbing to her cancer. Upon her death, the family requested that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in her name for the construction of a house in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. An outpouring of love from family, friends and former students raised enough money to build two houses.

Walter Mullican 2025 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Longtime Oklahoma pastor, denominational worker and international missionary Walter Mullican has been selected to receive the Oklahoma Baptists Distinguished Service Award for 2025.

Walter and his wife, Kathy Daugherty Mullican, grew up in Shawnee. High school sweethearts, they have been married for 48 years.



“We love road tripping, fishing, thrifting, and photography,” Walter said.

Walter graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) in 1982 (BA Religion), Southwestern Seminary in 1986 in Fort Worth (M.Div.), and Midwestern Seminary in 2002 in Kansas City (D.Min) with his dissertation focusing on the role of prayer in church growth.

He served as senior pastor of the Oklahoma City, Portland Avenue for 29½ years, transitioning from that ministry in November 2021.

Portland Avenue is an urban church which Mullican walked through revitalization and helped them transition to community outreach and ministry.

He also formerly served as pastor at Eufaula, First (1988-1992) and Panhandle, Texas, Calvary (1986-1988).

He served on the boards of OBU, and Baptist Villages of Oklahoma (BVC); as Pastor’s Conference President of Oklahoma Baptists, and as 1st and 2nd Vice-President of Oklahoma Baptists.

He also served for 20 years on the board of Hospitality House of Oklahoma in McAlester and as a chaplain following the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City in 1995.

Walter currently is an executive coach with Tall Oaks Coaching of Edmond, where he invests in the lives of those in ministry on a weekly basis.

Through the Moving Forward process of Oklahoma Baptists, Mullican has served as Interim Pastor at Ringwood, First and as Transitional Pastor at Bridge Creek, Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Bridge Creek, and currently as Transitional Pastor

at Jones, First.

Walter has been involved in missions work teaching English in Ukraine since 2010, having traveled there 15 times and now leads English Courses online with Michael Gott International of Keller, Texas.

Mullican maintains a positive outlook. He didn't let the international travel ban deter him from finding ways to share the Gospel through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2007, Mullican has served with an evangelism group to teach English in Ukraine. For the past couple of years, he has travelled with the Texas Country Boys, a Christian group that developed specifically to perform in Ukraine.

Along with teaching English, Mullican goes with the music group to coordinate evangelistic follow-up at the concerts.

"After singing country songs, the Texas Country Boys sing songs more focused on the Gospel," Mullican explained. "Then Michael Gott will give a message. As they exit the concert they receive a little survey. They fill it out, and we interpret if they made a decision for Christ. They get a Bible as well as a digital link to the music. This is a connection point. Because we have this follow-up information, we can leave that with the local churches, which use the follow-up information to connect with people who attend the concerts."

Since the 2020 trip to Ukraine was cancelled, Mullican still found a way to stay in touch with Ukrainians. He developed an English school by using Zoom, the popular online communication system.

The Mullicans have six adult children: Tony, Daniel, Katy, Kristy, Andrew, and Amy; 11 grandchildren and one granddaughter in Heaven.



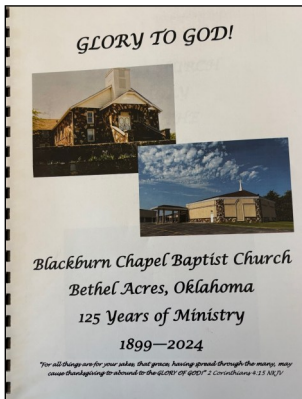
Mullican teaches English to Ukrainians through Zoom.

Bethel Acres, Blackburn Chapel Earns Church History Award

Glory to God!, Bethel Acres, Blackburn Chapel's church history celebrating the church's 125th anniversary as been selected by a committee of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission to receive the Gaskin Church History Award for 2024.

The modest, spiral bound document is dedicated "To all those before us whose faith kept us strong—we remember . . . May all who come behind us find us faithful."

The annual award is presented each year based on specific criteria, including clarity of title, grammar, readability, photographs, and typographical qualities.



Blackburn Chapel traces its roots back to territorial days in the Friendship Baptist Association, the forerunner of the Pottawatomie-Lincoln Association. The church, originally called Valley Grove Baptist Church, was organized on May 9, 1899 at Valley Grove School, one-half mile west and one mile north of its present site.

The first service was a brush arbor revival in 1901 or 1902 before Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Blackburn deeded two acres of land for a church and cemetery on land that had been Charley Beaver's allotment.

Larry Sparks has served as pastor of the church three times, currently since 2023. Other staff members include music leader Greg Ray; youth pastor Andy Arnold; children's director Sherry Sparks; ministry assistant Mona Arneson and pianist Marti Roberts.

In addition to the normal activities such as VBS, CrossTimbers children's camp and youth involved with camp at Falls Creek, high school activities and Youth Evangelism Conference, many members of the church participate in mission trips to Guatemala and Portugal, share the Gospel through area jail and prison ministries, music ministry, a clothes closet, welcoming new students to OBU, and participating in the annual Shawnee Christmas Parade.

Memorial Gifts

On Sept. 8, 1998 by vote of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission, a memorial fund was established whereby a gift of \$25 or more may be made to the Gaskin Historical Archives and Library Forever Fund in memory of a deceased relative or friend. The following list includes those gifts in alphabetical order for those honored.

Del Allen, Wilburton

Given by Sans Bois Association

Ramona Allen, Wilburton

Given by John and Pat Hart

Ramona Allen, Wilburton

Given by Delmer, Charity and Tim Allen

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Given by Winfred T. and Grace L., Knight, Jr.

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Given by Lemuel Ball

Margie Ball, Claremore

Given by Lemuel Ball

Bob Burrows, Amarillo, Texas

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Pluma Cantrell, Sallisaw

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George Hill, Coalgate

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Mrs. Carrell Hooper, Durant

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Given by the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Nadean Justice, Oklahoma City

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Burl Mackey, Edmond

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Given by Patricia Roberts

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John H. Morton, Durant

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Given by Bill J. Morton

Barbara Peaden, Oklahoma City

Given by Winfred T. and Grace L. Knight, Jr.

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Given by Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Wenonah Willene Pierce, Fayetteville, Ark.

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William G. Tanner, Belton, Texas

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H. Alton Webb, Anadarko

Given by J.M. and Helen Gaskin

Almeda Welch, Durant

Given by J.M. and Helen Gaskin

Hazel Marie Williams White, Wilburton

Given by Del and Ramona Allen

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Digital issues of the *Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle* have been posted to the Oklahoma Baptists' web site.

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