



William Odell Crews, Jr.

February 8, 1936 - March 1, 2017

William O. "Bill" Crews, 81, president emeritus of Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, died March 1 after a brief illness in Vancouver, Wash. "He was a friend and mentor to many, who will miss him deeply," said Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary. "His impact at Gateway Seminary lives on through our emphasis on shaping leaders -- Bill's passion and legacy." Crews became the sixth president of Gateway Seminary (formerly Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary) in December 1986. He transitioned to the role of chancellor in 2003 and retired from the seminary in 2005. He subsequently was elected by the Northwest Baptist Convention as executive director-treasurer in 2007, serving until his second retirement at the end of 2012. During the late 1970s, Crews served as the convention's director of communications and editor of the Northwest Baptist Witness. Crews was pastor of eight churches over a span of 32 years, including the 2,300-member Magnolia Avenue Baptist Church in Riverside, Calif., for eight years and churches in Washington, Oregon and Texas. He was elected as president of the California Southern Baptist Convention and, earlier, the Northwest Baptist Convention. During his 18-year tenure as Gateway president, the seminary established new campuses in Phoenix in 1995 and Denver in 1996. The seminary also achieved accreditation approval to offer full master's degrees at all five of its campuses. Enrollment rose to 1,600 students in 2004 from 865 in 1986. In 2005, the seminary honored Crews by announcing an endowed William O. Crews Chair of Leadership, creating a special section of the

seminary library housing leadership books and materials named in Crews' honor, and establishing a "Crews Leadership Award." Crews was named to the 22-member SBC Peace Committee to study theological strife in the convention when it was formed in 1985, resigning when he became Gateway's president in December 1986. Also in SBC life, Crews served as a trustee for Gateway and the then-Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) and was chairman of the executive boards for both the Northwest and California conventions. As president emeritus, Crews taught at Gateway Seminary's Pacific Northwest Campus in Vancouver, Wash., until his death. He was active in community service, including the Rotary Club for nearly a half-century, serving in numerous leadership positions. A native of Houston who grew up in San Angelo, Texas, and preached his first sermon at age 15, Crews held a doctor of ministry degree from Gateway Seminary; a bachelor of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas; and a bachelor of arts degree from Hardin-Simmons University in Texas. He received Southwestern's distinguished alumni award in 1994 and was awarded two honorary degrees in 1987 -- the doctor of humanities degree from Hardin-Simmons and the doctor of divinity degree from California Baptist University. Crews was led to Christ by a Sunday School teacher called "Mother Boyd" at a Baptist mission across the street which he said was "the formative church in my life," started by a Baptist preacher-carpenter named Wade Campbell who had "a burning dream to form a new church." Crews, in a 1988 article in the former Baptist Program magazine, also noted that the conversion of his father, a truck driver, on the side of the road during a nighttime run "turned our family around." Frank S. Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said Crews was "a great example of a servant leader who grew to love the West and the Northwest." The Executive Committee, in a 2005 resolution of appreciation after Crews' retirement from Gateway, noted that he was respected by colleagues and friends "for his integrity, devotion, faithfulness, compassion, warmth, and unflagging commitment to reaching the West for Christ." Crews is survived by his wife, the former Jo Ann

Cunningham and granddaughter, Nicole Crews. He was preceded in death by a son, Ronald, and a daughter, Rhonda. A memorial service for Crews will be at 1 p.m. Friday, March 10, at Pathway Church (formerly Greater Gresham Baptist Church) in Gresham, Ore. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Gateway Seminary and designated for the William O. Crews Chair of Christian Leadership or the William O. Crews Scholarship Fund.

Tribute Wall

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“ Blessings to JoAnn and Nicole Crews. I met JoAnn and Bill in 1962 when I became a Christian at Seventh Avenue Baptist Church in Ballenger, Texas. Bill communicated every year with a Christmas letter, that was not received this past year, so I now know why. Please contact me at my email address if you wish. Dorothy Silliman.

Dorothy Silliman - February 05, 2018 at 12:00 AM

MJ

“ Coming from the family background that is mine, I have had several spiritual father's over these last 63 years. Four to be exact. Bill's warm welcome into Glory now means the last of these is there, in Glory, I hope and pray waiting my arrival. I have full assurance of my salvation but I long to see them again, to be with them, to spend time them. His honoring of Christ upon this earth leads me to want to make sure I honor my Savior even more. Please rejoice today that our friend is waiting on us, not actively, actively he is worshiping, and serving his Savior in glory.

Mike Janz - March 21, 2017 at 12:00 AM