

College president Larry Kennedy dies from ALS complications

Sep 21, 2006

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (BP)--Larry Kennedy, president of William Carey University, died from complications from ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's Disease) in the early morning hours of Sept. 21 at his home in Hattiesburg, Miss. He was 64.

Kennedy, who was diagnosed with the disease in July 2005, had been president of the Baptist-related university since 1998.

Kennedy joined William Carey's faculty in 1991. He served as professor of religion, dean of the Cooper School of Missions and Biblical Studies and vice president of church relations and was the university's interim president from October 1997 until his selection as president in August 1998.

Under his leadership, William Carey's enrollment grew from 1,980 to 3,000 students as new programs and degrees were added in Hattiesburg and at the university's Gulf Coast campus. Its 550 graduates last May marked the largest commencement in the university's 100-year history. William Carey's accreditation was reaffirmed for 10 years and \$22 million in construction and renovation projects were completed during his tenure. The university, founded in 1906, is debt-free as it celebrates its centennial, with its \$7-million-plus debt paid off in January 10 months ahead of schedule.

Colleagues recounted appreciation for Kennedy's contagious laugh, creative problem-solving and fairness to all individuals, while embracing the motto of the university's namesake, William Carey, the father of the modern missions movement: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

"Dr. Kennedy is an example of a man facing a deteriorating disease with class and dignity and resolve," said Rep. Chip Pickering, R.-Miss., in a news release during ALS Awareness Month in May. "He reminds us that anyone can be afflicted by this condition which has no currently known cause, cure or means of prevention."

The Pickering news release recounted that Kennedy's intention to announce his condition in September 2005 was derailed by Hurricane Katrina, which ravaged the Hattiesburg campus, destroyed the Gulf Coast campus and closed the university's nursing school in New Orleans. "After shepherding the school through that natural disaster," the news release stated, "Dr. Kennedy again put off his announcement ... when the college was presented with a generous contribution ... so as not to detract from the news of the gift. He finally announced his condition in the spring of 2006."

Kennedy also had received numerous community honors; in 2005, he was named Executive of the Year by the Sales and Marketing Executives of Hattiesburg.

Previously as a pastor in Mississippi, Kennedy had served in various roles with the Mississippi Baptist Convention, including membership on the Executive Committee and the Education Commission. He also served as a trustee of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board for eight years.

He was the author of two books, "Down with Anxiety" and "God's Answers to Human Dilemmas."

A native of Ville Platte, La., he grew up in Pensacola, Fla.; received a history degree from Louisiana College; and earned a master of theology degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and master of arts and Ph.D. degrees in history from Mississippi State University.

Survivors include his wife Sarah Johnson Kennedy; two sons, Stephen of Jackson, Miss., and Scott Kennedy of Missoula, Mont.; a stepson, Kyle Robertson of Laurel, Miss.; one grandson; and his parents, Wells Earnest and Cecilia Kennedy of

Pensacola, Fla.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 23, in the Thomas Fine Arts Center on the Hattiesburg campus. Visitation will be from 5:30-9 p.m. Friday in the Thomas Business Building, also on campus.

In lieu of flowers, Kennedy had asked that donations be made to the Larry W. Kennedy Scholarship Fund at William Carey University.

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