

Former SBC president Charles Stanley passes at age 90

ATLANTA (Baptist Press and local reports) – Charles Stanley, former Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) president and one of the nation’s foremost television and radio preachers, died at his home April 18 at age 90.

The pastor emeritus of First Church, Atlanta, presided over the two largest annual meetings in SBC history: 45,531 messengers in 1985 in Dallas and 40,987 in 1986 in Atlanta.

Stanley transitioned to pastor emeritus in September 2020 at age 87, having led First Church, Atlanta, for nearly 50 years. Anthony George, senior associate pastor since 2012, succeeded him.



STANLEY RETIRES – Charles Stanley (right), longtime pastor of First Church, Atlanta, congratulates his successor Anthony George after the congregation called George to succeed Stanley in September 2020 upon Stanley’s retirement.

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(Photo credit: In Touch Ministries)

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In SBC life prior to his presidency, Charles Stanley was the 1984 president of the SBC Pastors' Conference that precedes the convention's annual meeting, and he was the 1983 chairman of the Committee on Nominations (then called the Committee on Boards).

As SBC president, Stanley served on the 22-member Peace Committee in 1985 that was tasked with identifying "the sources of the controversies" within the SBC and making recommendations for reconciliation and cooperation in "evangelism, missions, Christian education and other causes...

all to the glory of God.”

Stanley became senior pastor of First Church, Atlanta, in 1971 at age 40. Prior to that, he was associate pastor. He led a relocation of the church from downtown and Midtown Atlanta, where it had been located at several sites since its founding in 1848, to a renovated distribution facility in a 50-acre tract in the north Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody.

Stanley first came to the Atlanta congregation as associate pastor in 1969. He earlier was pastor of First Church, Bartow, Fla.; First Church, Miami, Fla.; First Church, Fairborn, Ohio; and Fruitland Church near Hendersonville, N.C., where he also taught at the Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute.

He held doctorate and master's degrees in theology from Luther Rice Seminary in Atlanta; a divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth; and an undergraduate degree from the University of Richmond in Richmond, Va.

Stanley authored more than 60 books, including two stemming from his hobby of photography. “I can preach for 50 minutes,” he told the 2019 Southeastern Photojournalism Conference at the SBC Building in Nashville, “but if I show you something on a big screen that says something about that, you may forget what I said but you will not forget what you saw and then God will connect the two.”

A native of Dry Fork, Va., Stanley was raised by his mother Rebecca after his father died from kidney disease when he was less than a year old. His grandfather was a Pentecostal preacher in North Carolina, and mother and son attended the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Danville, Va., amid frequent moves during their hardscrabble life in the Great Depression era.

He made a profession of faith at age 11 during a revival service.

In addition to son and fellow pastor Andy Stanley, he is survived by daughter Becky Stanley Brodersen, six grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and half-sister Susie Cox.

The Stanley family will hold a private memorial service. However, Stanley's body will lie in repose 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on April 22 at First Church, Atlanta.