

WCU mourns the passing of Dr. Tommy King

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William Carey University mourns the passing of President Emeritus Tommy King, whose wisdom guided the university for more than 15 years – overseeing explosive growth in student enrollment and visionary expansions in programming and infrastructure.

“Dr. King’s love for William Carey University was unmatched and his leadership took us to another level. His lifetime of service in the field of education, and with the Baptist churches of Mississippi, changed the lives of Mississippians for generations,” said WCU President Ben Burnett.

“His vision inspired all who were fortunate to work alongside him – and the impact he had on all of us is immeasurable. I count myself blessed to have worked directly under his leadership for the last 10 years of my career and I am humbled to follow in his footsteps as president of William Carey University.”

Lifetime of service

King, 82, died Nov. 22 at Forrest General – Asbury Hospice Center, surrounded by his family and lifted up in prayer by people all over the state of Mississippi.

The first Carey graduate to be named president, King came to the position with more than 30 years of experience in public education from elementary to university levels. At WCU, he served earlier as dean of the school of psychology and counseling, vice president for graduate and off-campus programs, professor of psychology, and executive vice president.

Under his leadership as president, a new 50-acre campus was established in Biloxi after Hurricane Katrina. The Hattiesburg campus grew from 135 acres to 170 acres. The College of Osteopathic Medicine opened in 2010, the Doctorate in Physical Therapy program began in fall 2016, and a new College of Health Sciences Building opened in July 2021. At the Tradition campus, the School of Pharmacy accepted its first students in 2018 and, in the same year, WCU cut the ribbon on Scianna Hall – an academic building that also boasts a large community meeting place.

The number of sports teams increased from six to 18, and the university offered new degrees and online/hybrid classes. Enrollment more than doubled during King's tenure.

Finally, it was King whose steady heart, and faith in God, guided the Carey family's steps after an EF-3 tornado devastated the Hattiesburg campus in February 2017.

A man's character

But a man is more than his resume. His character stands revealed in small acts, as well as large ones. A student speaking at a ribbon-cutting for the King Student Center in spring 2021 said this of Tommy King:

"Dr. King, I asked students to choose one word that expresses what you mean to them. And these are some of the words they shared – dedicated, visionary, eloquent, genuine, friendly, wise, welcoming, perseverant, optimistic, personable, considerate, hospitable, caring, supportive, thoughtful, approachable, gentle, and kind," Carey Scholar Bryson Rogers said.

"All of the personal stories I heard reinforce that you are present, you do not isolate yourself from us, you live life among us, you take time for people."

And the truth is, King did so much of his visiting in a golf

cart, that the Carey family can't help but look to see if it's him whenever one rolls by.

Brett Golson, WCU vice president of spiritual development, said King's legacy and influence will be remembered for generations.

"With heavy hearts, we mourn the passing of our longtime leader and friend. Dr. Tommy King blessed us with his leadership as president of William Carey University and enriched our spiritual lives as a pastor and church statesman. His profound commitment to education and ministry has left an indelible mark on tens of thousands of students, parents, and the community of faith," Golson said.

Visitation for King was Monday, Nov. 27, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at First Church in Columbia, followed by a funeral service at 11 a.m. Colonial Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Tommy King Missionary Dependent Scholarship. William Carey University offers tuition, textbooks, room, and meal plan free of charge to all International Mission Board dependent children. This scholarship ensures WCU's ability to continue offering this scholarship to the children of our IMB missionaries.

Use this link to make a donation:
www.WmCarey.edu/KingMemorial