

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, age 81, of Monroe, Louisiana, passed peacefully from this life to the next on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, at St. Francis Medical Center in Monroe following several months of significant health issues. Rev. Gaddy was the Pastor Emeritus of Northminster Church, a progressive Baptist congregation in Monroe, having served as Senior Pastor for 25 years from 1992 to his retirement in 2016. He was also the President Emeritus of Interfaith Alliance in Washington, D.C., having served as its President for 17 years from 1997 to his retirement in 2014.

For 52 years he was married to his best friend and encourager Julia Mae (Judy) Grabiell Gaddy. During Dr. Gaddy's 17 years with Interfaith Alliance he and Judy maintained homes in Monroe and Washington, and he commuted weekly to carry out his responsibilities in both places. Welton said having one foot in church life and another in the advocacy space gave him a perspective that strengthened his work in both spheres.

Among Interfaith Alliance's many accomplishments under Dr. Gaddy's leadership were his incisive paper making a case for marriage equality from a faith perspective; his passionate advocacy challenging antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and other forms of hate targeting religious minorities; and the protection of the vital boundaries between religion and government as he pushed successive administrations from both parties to avoid unnecessary entanglements.

Beginning in 2006 until last year Dr. Gaddy was also the host of Interfaith Alliance's weekly radio program *State of Belief* where he explored the role of religion in the life of the nation. There, he illustrated the vast diversity of beliefs in America while exposing and critiquing both the political manipulation of religion for partisan purposes and religious manipulation of government for sectarian purposes.

As Senior Pastor at Northminster Church Rev. Gaddy preached on a weekly basis, and he loved preaching. His sermons were Biblical, thoughtful, thought provoking, intelligent, and at times challenging and prophetic. All 25 years of his sermons at Northminster have been archived by the church. In his pastoral ministry and his life, he always sought to follow the words of the prophet Micah "to do justice, love mercy and to walk humbly with God". Over the course of his ministry, he also provided helpful counsel to countless individuals. In 1994, he helped lead Northminster to form a partnership relationship with Iglesia Bautista Enmanuel in Ciego de Avila, Cuba, and he was passionate about that relationship.

His favorite word was "grace" which he offered to everyone he met. He graced us all with his charm, his intelligence, his integrity, his wit, his courage. Whether on the national stage or from his local pulpit, there are so many political, social, and theological positions where he influenced so many of us: on salvation, freedom, justice, inclusion, love, peace to name but a few. He challenged us out of our comfort zones in search of truth, beyond the norm, beyond tradition, beyond prejudices, beyond oppressive structures.

Curtis Welton Gaddy was born in Paris, Tennessee, to loving parents George D. and Jenola Gaddy. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, before attending the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he received his master's in theology in 1968 and his Ph.D. in 1970. Before becoming Northminster's Senior Pastor, Dr. Gaddy pastored churches in several southern states and he served as campus minister at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, from 1984 to 1988. He was active in the Southern Baptist Convention, serving as Director of Christian Citizenship Development of the Christian Life Commission from 1973-77 and on the denomination's Executive Committee from 1980-1984 before leaving the denomination when fundamentalists took over leadership later in the decade.

While ministering with a message of inclusion of all people in church and society, Dr. Gaddy emerged as a leader among progressive Baptists. Among his many leadership roles, he was a founder of the progressive Alliance of Baptists, serving as its President on one occasion and was a 20-year member of the Commission of Christian Ethics of the Baptist World Alliance. His past leadership roles include serving as President of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Chair of the Pastoral Leadership Commission of the Baptist World Alliance, and member of the World Economic Forum's Council of 100.

Dr. Gaddy was the author of more than 25 books, including his last one *I Give You My WORD: Sharing the Language of Life, A Love Affair with God* and, with the late Rev. Donald W. Nixon, then Northminster's Minister of the Arts, a three-volume series entitled *Worship: Symphony for the Senses*. He also edited and authored a book on the history of Northminster's early years entitled *Coming Home: For All Who Dream of a New Church*. As President of Interfaith Alliance, he appeared regularly on national news programs providing commentary on issues relating to religion and politics.

Dr. Gaddy was preceded in death by his parents and his and Judy's son, John Paul Gaddy. He is survived by his wife Judy, his son and daughter-in-law, James Welton and Amanda Reynolds Gaddy and two grandsons of whom he was exceedingly proud, Reynolds Welton Gaddy and Jameson Taylor Gaddy, as well as a great host of friends and colleagues who became a part of his larger family through his love and devotion to justice and peace.

A memorial service and celebration of his life will be held at Northminster Church, 2701 Lamy Lane, Monroe, Louisiana, on Friday, July 7 at 11:00 a.m. with Northminster's Senior Pastor, Rev. Jillian Hankamer, as the officiant. The service will also be live-streamed and archived on the church's YouTube channel. In lieu of flowers the family requests that any memorial gifts be made to the John Paul Gaddy Scholarship Fund at the Stratford Academy in Macon, Georgia, Northminster Church, or Interfaith Alliance.

The family especially wishes to thank Welton's dear friends Patti Pate, Beth Ingram, Mark Windham, and David Culp and the many other Northminster members and friends who visited and attended to him during his final months.