



FIRST BAPTIST
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Tributes to Rev. Dr. Doyle Sager

Doyle Sager, lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Jefferson City since 1997, passed away Friday (Jan. 22) after a battle with cancer. In addition to a rich legacy of ministry, he leaves behind his wife, Janet, of 48 years, three grown children, eight grandchildren, one brother, one sister, and many loved extended family members.

“Doyle was an exceptional preacher and pastor, possessing a sharp mind and a tender heart,” said Melissa Hatfield, FBC’s pastor of youth and missions. “In all he did, love was his motive, and love was his method. God gifted Doyle a pastor’s heart, and once he recognized that at the age of 15, Doyle never looked back. The mantle of shepherd was sacred to him, and he was a tremendous steward of the trust and sacredness of that calling.”

Sager, 69, was born in Bethany, Missouri, on Dec. 31, 1951. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, and a Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City.

“I am thankful for having had the privilege of working with Doyle as my pastor, boss, and friend for almost 30 years,” said Rod Maples, FBC’s pastor of worship, who also worked on staff with Sager at First Baptist Church in Sedalia before they both came to Jefferson City. “There was never a time when he stepped into the pulpit when he was not prepared. He was a humble, faithful servant of God who spoke the word of God with truth and love.”

Ordained into the ministry in 1970 by McFall Baptist Church in McFall, Missouri, Sager spent the next 50 years as a pastor. Before coming to FBC in Jefferson City, he also served at McFall (1970-1972), Calhoun Baptist Church in Calhoun, Missouri (1972-1975), King Hill Baptist Church in St. Joseph (1976-1985), and FBC in Sedalia (1985-1997).

“The first time my family met Doyle, he brought our daughter a gift and sat on our living room floor to play with her,” said Hannah Coe, FBC’s pastor of families and faith formation. “I hold most dear the way Doyle reached out to love all people as God’s children and his genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Doyle had so much love, grace, and joy left to give. I give thanks for how

generously Doyle loved, enough that our hearts are full and we have plenty to pay forward.”

In addition to pastoring, Sager served in many leadership roles in Baptist life across the state, nation, and world. These roles included president of the Missouri Baptist Convention (1995-1996), president of Churchnet (2011-2012), co-founder and president of Mainstream Missouri Baptists (1999-2002), and three years on the national coordinating council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He also served on the board of trustees for William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, for 19 years, and wrote a monthly column for both *Baptist News Global* and *Word&Way*.

“Doyle Sager’s influence on my life as a shining example of a servant of Christ stretches across nearly 40 years,” said James Preston, FBC’s spiritual formation coordinator. “For three years as I worked on my doctorate, he was there for me helping me through to completion. Later, when I and my family needed a refuge, he welcomed us to First Baptist Church. To me, he is mentor, professor, pastor and confessor, colleague, and friend. His impact on me and my family is immeasurable and will live well beyond our lifetimes. It is humbling to think that I am just one of many hundreds of people with the mark of Christ largely shaped by Doyle’s ministry, to the glory of God.”

Sager also engaged in advocacy through Bread for the World and Missouri Faith Voices, addressing issues like predatory lending, immigration, racial justice, Medicaid Expansion, city transit needs, voting rights, environmental justice, and global food security. He served on the Baptist World Alliance’s Commission on Social and Economic Justice (2015-2020), and was elected in 2020 to a five-year term as vice chair of the BWA’s Commission on Creation Care.

“In Doyle I found what it is like to have a wiser elder brother (although he is only a few months older than I am),” said Stephen Mathis, chair of FBC’s personnel committee. “I could talk with him about loving and raising a family, making career choices, dealing with disappointment, growing in Christ, caring for the whole world (not just me, myself, and mine). Doyle modeled living the Christian life in the world but not of the world. Through his sermons, writings, counseling, and friendship he challenged me to apply Jesus’s teaching outside the walls of a church and beyond the dogmas that accompanied my faith heritage. I thank God for the privilege of having Doyle as my pastor, friend, and ‘brother’ for 25 years. It has been life-changing!”

Note: More information, including about services and ways to support his family, can be found at fbcjc.org/doylesager.

Statements from State, National, & Global Baptist Leaders:

Elijah Brown, general secretary & CEO of the Baptist World Alliance:

Doyle was a friend. He was always ready with a word of encouragement and a smile of understanding. When I was with Doyle, he made me feel as if it was possible to live out God's calling today. I treasured our time together which was often in various cities far from home and always connected to the mission of God. Like a true friend, his words also brought convicting challenge. Many a week, I found myself growing again through the wisdom and spiritual insight Doyle penned as an outgrowth of his walk with the Lord.

For in abiding love, Doyle was a friend of the Lord. The Spirit flowed through him and touched the lives of many. BWA leaders from around the world have shared of the Kingdom impact and eternal legacy Doyle leaves behind, and of their ongoing prayers for Doyle's family. Over these last few months, Doyle has continued to lead the way, as a true friend does, in a path that has pointed all of us to Christ.

The Baptist World Alliance family mourns the passing of our friend Doyle, is inspired by the Kingdom impact he has made, and continues to hold all of his family and loved ones in our prayers.

Jeremy Bell, general secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship:

Doyle Sager was a supportive, welcoming, and encouraging man whose example of living the fruit of the Spirit blessed me from the moment I met him. Doyle understood what it was to live with those of very diverse interests and backgrounds which is so characteristic of Baptist life and experience.

I will miss his warmth, intellectual inquisitiveness and great good humor. I join so many others in thankfulness for Doyle's life, ministry, and ongoing legacy.

Carol McEntyre, moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Columbia:

In 2012, when I became senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Columbia, Doyle Sager was one of the first colleagues in the area to reach out to me. He invited me to be a part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Peer

Learning Group, which he helped found in 2004, one of the longest running peer groups in CBF. This was my first senior pastorate, and I was feeling overwhelmed by the scope of the job. I told Doyle that I would join the peer group when things slowed down but he wisely and rightly told me that would never happen. He encouraged me to learn to prioritize caring for myself in order to care for my congregation. In that moment, I knew Doyle was a seasoned pastor I could trust. Over the years, I would rely on him for guidance when difficult pastoral issues arose. I soon learned that Doyle was generous with his time and provided this kind of support to countless other young pastors and ministers in Cooperative Baptist Fellowship life.

In addition, when I attended my first CBF Heartland meeting, I recognized how the respect I had for Doyle was shared in the wider CBF family. It is a respect and appreciation that can only develop overtime. As Moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, I have seen how important these relationships are. First Baptist Jefferson City, CBF Heartland, and the broader CBF community are blessed to have had a long-term commitment from such a wise and gifted leader.

I would also be remiss if I did not add that Doyle's wisdom came with a dose of joy and humor. He loved to laugh and joke with colleagues. This is a gift of his wisdom too, for he carried the knowledge that relationships, laughter, and joy are part of what make ministry so rewarding.

Brian W. Ford, executive director of Churchnet:

The Churchnet family grieves the loss of our good friend and colleague, Doyle Sager. For our organization, Doyle held many leadership roles including board member and president. His leadership was a key to the transformation of what the organization has become to this day. His leadership was gracious, efficient, and influential in keeping our mission focused on serving churches by fostering collaboration and hope for engaging new generations and cultures.

He graciously shared his lived experiences from his rich professional ministry career serving local churches throughout Missouri. He understood the complexities of doing and being the local church in our local and global context. Over the years, Doyle helped serve as a Churchnet representative to the global Baptist family with the Baptist World Alliance. It was a joy to watch him network and foster global relationships among leaders from multiple nations and cultures. Although Doyle was hesitant to stay up late, try spicy foods, and swim in the Dead Sea, he was a true churchman and

global citizen of God's kingdom. Doyle has left an indelible mark on our organization and our global partners, for which we are very grateful.

Jeff Langford, coordinator of CBF Heartland:

CBF Heartland and the entire Cooperative Baptist Fellowship family is grieving the loss of our friend and colleague, Doyle Sager. Doyle had a deep impact on the lives of so many in Missouri and across the country.

As a pastor, he was a mentor and encourager to other pastors and Christians of all kinds. As a Baptist, he cared deeply about Baptist freedoms and organizations and supported them generously with his time and energy. As a leader, Doyle spoke and wrote with a voice that was both loving and prophetic; he challenged and inspired in equal measure.

We extend our deepest condolences to Janet, the Sager family, and to First Baptist Church.

Brian Kaylor, editor & president of *Word&Way*:

When I became editor of *Word&Way*, I "inherited" Doyle as a columnist, much as I had gained him as a pastor just two years earlier when we moved to Jefferson City and started attending First Baptist. Always driven to improve, his writing in recent years was sharper and richer than ever. With this writing "pulpit," he ministered to people he never met as he opened up about his life, including moments of pain, doubt, and discouragement. And yet, as in real life, his joy always came through.

He also became a conversation partner as we wrestled together with issues of faith, culture, and the Bible—and usually in a way that ended in laughter as one of us teased the other about some position or comment. We advocated together for social justice, and we traveled across the country and around the world for times of worship, learning, and fellowship with other Baptists. Along the way, I inherited much from him as he passed down his ministry insights.