

On July 10, 2010 the University Avenue Church of Christ in Austin, Texas honored Jack and Ruth Wright with a surprise reception. Friends and family gathered to express gratitude to the Wrights for their years of service at the University Avenue church. Dr. Stan Reid, president of Austin Graduate School of Theology, was invited to speak about the Wrights work with the school.

A Legacy at Austin Graduate School of Theology: A Tribute to Jack and Ruth Wright

University Avenue Church of Christ
July 10, 2010

The 19th century Danish Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, “We live forward, but we understand backwards.” Kierkegaard’s observation is applicable to our understanding of Austin Grad’s move forward. As we understand backwards, it is clear that no group has given more support and leadership toward the development of our school than the University Avenue (UA) elders. No church has come close to UA in its financial support and direction.

In terms of individuals there are a number of names that stand out in the history of our school. Names like G.H.P. Showalter, Charles Roberson, A.B. Cox, Claude Hocott, the Weber family, Bill and Jenny Millican, Pat Harrell, James Thompson, Allan McNicol, and Michael Weed. That list is not comprehensive, but is representative of the many people who made significant contributions to the formation of Austin Grad in years past.

Regarding historical dates there are several that are remembered as pivotal moments.

1. 1917/18 as the years of vision and implementation of the Bible Chair at the University of Texas.
2. 1964 as the year that a committee led by A.B. Cox recommended to the UA elders that the Bible chair program be expanded to become a degree granting institution focused on the training of ministers, teachers, missionaries, and church leaders.
3. 1972 when the Biblical Studies Center was launched and 1975 when the ICS was formed to offer a bachelor’s degree in Bible and ministry as envisioned by the Cox committee.
4. 1992 when the school began offering a master’s degree.
5. 2002 when the school gained independent accreditation as Austin Graduate School of Theology

However, as we understand backwards, I am convinced that we would be doing an injustice to our legacy at Austin Grad if we did not include the years 1979 and 1985 as

pivotal dates. In 1979, a couple from Baton Rouge named Jack and Ruth Wright were invited to join the Development Board of ICS. Jack and Ruth soon came to set the standard for volunteerism at our school. 1985 should be remembered as the year that the Wrights retired and moved to Austin for the specific purpose of volunteering at the school. This naturally led them to become highly involved in the life of UA with Jack eventually becoming an elder.

Jack's and Ruth's service to the school and the church is a tremendous example of the meaning of volunteerism. Considering the following statement in an article on school volunteers. "School systems around the world rely heavily on volunteers and donations in order to run effectively." The Wrights have been generous with both time and donations. To trace the meaning of the word volunteerism one will find definitions like:

"Volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. Volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity, intended to promote good or improve human quality of life."

If I were to summarize all the definitions of volunteerism it would be "Jack and Ruth Wright." For me, the Wrights have written the book on the meaning of volunteerism. As I read the following quotes, I think you will agree with me that Jack and Ruth personify each one.

Winston Churchill said: "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give."

An unknown source said: "Volunteers are love in motion."

Elizabeth Andrew said: "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart."

Helen Dyer said: "Volunteerism is the voice of the people put into action. These actions shape and mold the present into a future of which we can all be proud."

Yes, those quotations epitomize the Wrights and the legacy they have built at Austin Grad. Their actions have shaped Austin Grad through the years and continue to contribute to molding its future of which we can all be proud.

We are pleased to have the Wright name associated with Austin Grad in several ways including the Ruth Wright Reading Room in the library, the Jack and Ruth Wright Chair of NT Studies held by Dr. Jeff Peterson, and the Jack Wright President's Suite. In addition, Jack has served our school as vice-president, vice-chancellor, and now as a senior member of the board of trustees.

When we moved into our new building, I petitioned the board of trustees to name the President's office suite in honor Jack's legacy at the school. I did that for two reasons.

First, I was convinced that future generations of leaders at Austin Grad will be encouraged and motivated when they remember the impact Jack Wright had on the development, direction, and mission of the school.

My second reason was that Jack's work at Austin Grad meets the meaning of legacy which is defined as "something transmitted by or received from a predecessor or ancestor or from the past." Jack has built a legacy at Austin Grad that will inspire and motivate future generations at Austin Grad.

Ruth's sister, Mildred Covalt, sent a nice donation to Austin Grad this week. It was made in honor of Ruth and Jack. Mrs. Covalt requested that it be presented to them on this occasion. A certificate will be presented to the Wrights in recognition of this honor. We will also display a framed copy of the certificate in the Austin Grad lobby this week.

I must add a personal note before I finish. For me Jack has been a mentor, a friend, a confidant, and a pastor. He has been lavish in his praise, fair in his criticism, and always a kind gentleman. For that I am forever indebted and thankful.

We do well to attend to Kierkegaard's dictum that we live forward, but understand backwards. As I recall the history of Austin Grad and try to faithfully lead the school to fulfill its mission, I know that it would not be where it is today without the Wrights. They epitomize the meaning of volunteerism. I often wonder who will take the baton from Jack and carry on his legacy of gracious volunteerism at Austin Grad. In my more pessimistic moments, I doubt that anyone can fill Jack's shoes. But then, I also know that God has a way of surprising us with his wonderful gifts as he did back in 1985 when Jack and Ruth moved to Austin in order to bless the work of our school.

Ruth teasingly thanks me for giving Jack a place to go when she kicks him out of the house. Ruth, I say a heartfelt thank you for sharing Jack with us all these years. I cannot imagine Austin Grad without Jack's presence and leadership. Only God knows the complete extent of the good work both of you have done in the name of Jesus, through the gift of Spirit, and to God's glory. But today we take this moment to thank you for being the wonderful Christian servants you are.

Stan Reid