

Bill Hinson, Confessing Movement leader, dies at 68

The Rev. William Hinson, a founder and president of the Confessing Movement, died December 26, one month after suffering a massive stroke. He was 68. A leading evangelical voice in the United Methodist Church, Hinson helped found the Confessing Movement in 1995 and was serving a two-year term as its president when he died.

“He was a tireless and winsome witness to the apostolic faith,” the evangelical organization said in a statement.

Beyond his role in the Confessing Movement, Hinson led one of the denomination’s largest congregations for many years, served on United Methodist agencies, and was active in the World Methodist Council.

He died at Huntsville (Alabama) Hospital, where he had been since suffering a stroke November 28.

A native of Jeff Davis County, Georgia, Hinson began preaching at age 18 and served at several Georgia churches. He went on to lead First United Methodist Church of Houston, one of the denomination’s largest congregations, for 18 years. When he arrived in Houston in 1982, the congregation had 2,000 members. Nevertheless, the church was suffering from a loss of membership as families moved to the suburbs.

“We had lost two and three percent of our children every year for a generation,” Hinson told the Houston Chronicle in 2001. “The number of children was going down, down, down and the (average) age of the church was going up, up, up. It was 64 and jumping up every year.”

Hinson’s preaching and ministry turned the congregation around. When he retired, the church had grown to 12,500 members that worshipped on two different campuses. After retiring in 2001, he served on the staff of First United Methodist Church of Huntsville.

“Only the Lord knows the numbers of people who are in heaven today and others who will get there some day because of his preaching and personal witness,” said Dr. Maxie Dunnam, former president of Asbury Theological Seminary. “And what a preacher he was! He was one of the most effective in our denomination.”

Hinson was a traditional preacher who emphasized Scriptural authority and evangelism, and was involved in missions around the world, said the Rev. Don Cross, pastor of First Church in Huntsville.

“We loved and appreciated having him with us. He was always an asset to us,” Cross said. “I called it a journey, and it was just too short.”

Hinson received degrees from Georgia Southern University, Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and Boston University, as well as honorary doctorates from Asbury Theological Seminary and Houston Graduate School of Theology. Honors included the Denman Evangelism Award from the Texas Annual (regional) Conference in 1985 and the Philip Award for Outstanding Leadership in Evangelism in 2000.

He served on the World Methodist Council’s executive and evangelism committees. He also served as president of the Council on Finance and Administration, a member of the Board of Global Ministries, a trustee for Asbury

Seminary, and a delegate to several General and jurisdictional conferences. He wrote several books on evangelism, discipleship, and other topics.

Last spring, he addressed the denomination's 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh, when the assembly was abuzz with discussion of a possible split over theological differences, particularly with regard to issues of sexuality. Hinson and the Rev. Bruce Robbins, former top staff executive of the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, clarified the details of unofficial discussions that had occurred earlier that week between leaders with some of the church's advocacy groups.

"We cannot fight both church and culture," Hinson said. "That struggle, combined with the continuous struggle in the church, is more than we can bear. I believe the time has come when we must begin to explore an amicable and just separation."

After Hinson and Robbins addressed the assembly on May 7, the delegates adopted a resolution affirming their intent to remain united. A few months later, in September, the Confessing Movement issued a statement expressing concern that some people and groups were unwilling to abide by the denomination's Book of Discipline and were threatening the church's unity.

"Bill has championed renewal and has been a stalwart leader in United Methodism's recovery as a dynamic Wesleyan movement of personal and social holiness, evangelism, and mission, faithful to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints," recalled Dunnam.

"His speech at the last General Conference was grossly distorted and misinterpreted, and Bill was criticized unfairly. I know no one who loved

the United Methodist Church more than Bill did," Dunnam said. "Few people have played a comparable role in creative and compassionate leadership within our church."

Hinson is survived by his wife of 48 years, Jean Laird Hinson, three children, and 13 grandchildren.

Adapted from United Methodist News Service.