

Rev. Gene Bartlett, former divinity school president

ROCHESTER — The Rev. Gene Ebert Bartlett, former president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary, died Nov. 3, 1989, after a short illness. He was 79.

The Rev. Bartlett, who served as the divinity school's president from 1960-70, oversaw its transformation from a Baptist seminary to an ecumenical institution.

"Gene Bartlett was a great preacher and distinguished leader," said Larry L. Greenfield, outgoing president of the school. "To know him personally, however, was to recognize that the eloquence of his words was matched by the integrity of his life, and that his accomplishments as a leader were grounded in being a humble follower of Jesus. The divinity school has lost its president-emeritus and pastor; we all have lost an authentic 20th century incarnation of the Christian faith. But thank God we were privileged to be graced by his life."

Born in Parkersburg, W.Va., the Rev. Bartlett earned a bachelor of arts degree from Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and, in 1935, a bachelor of divinity degree from Colgate Rochester Divinity School. While attending the divinity school and for two years thereafter, he was pastor of the Hilton Baptist Church in Hilton, N.Y.

Between 1937 and 1960, the Rev. Bartlett served as the pastor of various churches across the country. He returned to Rochester in 1960 to take over duties as president of the divinity school.

During his tenure, a number of other schools were incorporated with the divinity school: the Baptist Missionary Training School, Chicago, in 1961; Bexley Hall, an Episcopal Seminary from Gambier, Ohio, in 1966; and Crozer Theological Seminary from Upland, Pa., in 1970.

In addition, under the Rev. Bartlett the divinity school became affiliated with the University of Rochester. He also initiated dialogue with officials at St. Bernard's Seminary, and helped form the Rochester Center for Theological Studies — a consortium of Catholic and Protestant churches — to train clergy.

"Gene Bartlett walked tall among us, as wise administrator, as eloquent teacher, as compassionate pastor, as devoted educator, as staunch ecumenist," said Father Sebastian A. Falcone, president of St. Bernard's Institute. "To have known him was to have been blessed. To all he was a man of truth and spirit; to me, a cherished friend."

The Rev. Bartlett was also involved with promoting interracial relations, chairing a committee formed in the mid-1960s after racial violence erupted in Rochester. That

committee later evolved into Rochester Jobs, Inc., which currently coordinates 40 industries and agencies working with minority groups to provide training and jobs.

At the divinity school, he supervised the initiation of the Black Church Studies program in 1969. The program was the first of its kind in a predominately white seminary.

In 1970, the Rev. Bartlett left the divinity school to become pastor of the first Baptist Church of Newton Centre, Mass. He served as president of the American Baptist Church in the United States in 1972-73. The Rev. Bartlett returned to Rochester in 1980 after he retired, and served as pastor-in-residence and, from 1981 until his death, president emeritus of Colgate Rochester.

A memorial service for the Rev. Bartlett was held at the Lake Avenue Baptist Church, Rochester, on Saturday, Nov. 11. Memorial gifts may be sent to Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester.

The Rev. Bartlett is survived by his wife, Jean; three sons, David Bartlett of Richmond, Va., Randall Bartlett of Northampton, Mass., and Stephen Bartlett of Rochester; two daughters, Marion Bartlett VanArsdell of Northampton and Margaret Bartlett of Boston; and nine grandchildren.

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