

BREAKING NEWS: Bethany Church Founder Roy Stockstill Passes Away at 97

Roy Stockstill, founder of Bethany Church in Baker, Louisiana, died Tuesday at the age of 97. Rev. Stockstill founded Bethany Church (then called Bethany World Prayer Center) in August 1963 with a "handful of people in his living room." The church now has five campuses and has grown to almost 10,000 members.

Rev. Stockstill's influence reached worldwide through hundreds of other churches planted by associate ministers. In addition, Bethany has given over \$70 million to local and foreign missions.

Larry Stockstill, Roy's son, pastored Bethany Church from 1983 to 2011. Larry then handed the reins to his son, Jonathan, on October 2, 2011.

"I love my Papaw ... Roy Stockstill went to heaven today," Jonathan Stockstill wrote on Bethany's Facebook page. "What an incredible role model of a man who loved his God, his family, his church, and his country. His last words to me were 'Jonathan, how blessed it is to live an obedient life.'

"I'm 1 percent sad and 99 percent glad because I know how much he was looking forward to seeing Jesus and his family. He kept asking me to pray for him to have patience because he wanted to go to heaven so bad. He was always hilarious, always filled with a word, always had a story ... and if he didn't, he would just say.. 'my my my.'"

Ruth Stockstill, his wife of 63 years, preceded Rev. Stockstill in death in 2008.

Rev. Stockstill fought in North Africa during World War II as a Staff Sergeant in the United States Air Force. He came to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1957, as the pastor of Florida Boulevard Baptist Church.

A 2010 Ministry Today article explained that the quiet witness of Roy's father, Joel Ernest Stockstill, led Roy to his faith in Christ.

"Because of his example, I too have been able to find the courage to make the right decisions in ministry, even at a great personal sacrifice," Roy said in that article. "Papa also demonstrated consistency in prayer. I recall his trip to the woodshed each morning for his daily prayer time. His alone time with God gave him the faith he needed to face literal and spiritual storms in his life."

Joel Stockstill became a lay preacher, ministering mainly in African-American congregations when American society looked down such a thing.

"In an era when it was unthinkable for a white man to cross racial lines, he would sometimes walk six miles to minister in small African-American churches," Roy said in the article. "His fierce love for the black community was reciprocated, and oftentimes a knock on our door in the middle of the night was an urgent request for Papa to go and pray for one of their members who had fallen sick or died."

A memorial service will be held for Rev. Stockstill at the Bethany North Campus on Sunday, Feb. 14, at 6 p.m. The family requests that donations be made the "Surge" church-planting project in lieu of flowers.