



TO CELEBRATE AND TO GIVE THANKS
FOR THE STORY OF

James Thomas McAfee Jr.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mercer University President R. Kirby Godsey gave the eulogy at the memorial service for James T. McAfee Jr. on Friday, November 5, 2004, at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta. Below is the text of that tribute to the life and legacy of Mr. McAfee.

BY R. KIRBY GODSEY

In moments of uncertainty when we are bent over with grief, taking each step haltingly because we are unable to see our way clearly, we huddle together in a place called sanctuary. We need to be here where we can sense in our souls that we are not alone. It is a place to touch shoulders, to hold hands, to lean against one another.

In this moment, the loss, the void, the emptiness is so very close, so visible, so unspeakable. But there is more.

We make a quarter turn. We were just there — having dinner at Bone's, evenings filled with laughter and celebrating friendships. So there is more than the loss, more even than the void. You see it is not only or even chiefly Jim's death that brings us together this morning. It is the common ground and the enduring bond generated by his presence that calls to us. You and I are all shaped and molded by our relationships and no person, I believe, ever related with more intensity or more devotion than did Jim.

Important relationships are like watermarks on fine paper. If we hold ourselves up to the light today, we can see Jim McAfee's watermark on our lives. We can't erase it. It won't fade. No matter what else we write on the pages of our lives, it is there. It is the mark of a relationship that transcends the years.

Jim had a habit of giving everybody a name. In conversations with Jim, we often had to help one another decode his names. I would sometimes have to ask, "Who is he talking about?" And the name was always his perception of some telling attribute of the person. One member of this congregation, a close confidant of the family, is Sharon Lim, a deacon, I believe, here at Second Ponce.

In recent months, he has referred to her simply as "12/4." For me that took a little interpretation until I learned

that her wedding day is to be the fourth day of December. So, after four bypasses and open heart surgery, Jim spies Sharon outside ICU and says, "Well, there's 12/4." Only last evening, someone here said to me, "Jim's name for me was 'Rabbi.'" Everybody at Mercer knows that they let me carry the designation of CEO (actually he called me "Commandant"), but if you are around Mercer long, you soon discover that the University officers really run the place. One of these officers is Emily Myers. So, Jim

dubbed her forever to be "General Myers." He would call the University and ask to speak to the General. Everyone soon learned that was Jim's name for Emily.

I should tell you that sometimes it was better not to know your Jim McAfee given name. But name us he did. And naming was his way of conveying that each person was individual and unique, that every person was a special gift to the world. When it came to people, he had a wide streak of intuitive understanding. He could sense people's character and, more often than not, he was right.

When I look at the watermark of Jim's life, I see a man who took hold of the torch of life, and he did not just hold it high. He ran with it, charging with energy and momentum, drive and determination. Jim pursued the life of work with laser-like focus, with insight and integrity. He loved Tom as a high treasure and God's greatest gift to him and Carolyn. And Jim's devotion to his beloved Carolyn knew no boundaries. She was the sun, the moon and the star of his life.

Jim lived with passion and intensity. He has wrung more from 65 years than most people could in twice the days. It is tempting for us to want him to have done it a little differently — to have run a little slower, to have lowered the wick, but it is foolishness. Jim lived with high spirit and with convictions that ran deep. Jim lived life with energy and stamina and joy until the end. His heart failed him. His spirit never did.

So, Jim's life should never be measured by the calendar. Nor can ours. Jim's life will be measured by achievement and laughter, by joy and family, by corporate leadership, and by his unbounded spirit of generosity.

Jim was a strong and vigorous personality. When people gathered, one rarely needed to ask, "Is Jim here?" His presence was usually self-evident. He was outspoken, often opinionated. He was rarely wrong, but he was never in doubt. If you didn't want a straightforward answer, it was better not to ask Jim the question. And while Jim had this rich love of laughter, when it was time to do business, Jim was all business, usually leading the conversations and managing the deliberations.

One of the threads woven through the fabric of both Jim's business and corporate achievements as well as his

friendships was what I refer to as an extraordinary aesthetic sensibility. Jim loved beauty — beautiful people, beautiful places. He admired the beauty of a well-run organization or business on the one hand and on the other, he appreciated the simple beauty of a rose and the awesome beauty of the coast and the mountains. He was always wanting to shine a light on Carolyn's beauty with elegant clothes from Allowee's or stunning jewelry from his own special jeweler.



Former President **Jimmy Carter**, center, addressed more than 500 people at a luncheon following the Oct. 21, 1996, dedication of the James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology at First Baptist Church, Decatur. Joining President Carter, from left, were **James** and **Carolyn McAfee**, for whom the new School was named, and Mercer University President and CEO **R. Kirby Godsey**.



Dean **R. Alan Culpepper**, center, cut the ceremonial ribbon in the lobby of the new School of Theology during an open house for faculty and staff members of the Cecil B. Day Campus. The Jan. 9, 1997, event also was held to welcome the staff of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to the campus. The CBF staff is housed on the second floor of the 30,000-square-foot building. On hand for the ceremony were, from left, **Daniel Vestal**, CBF moderator; **R. Kirby Godsey**, Mercer University president and CEO; and **Carolyn** and **James McAfee**, for whom the School of Theology is named.



But aesthetic sensibility also had an inner and intimate side. Jim loved music. He could sense the movement of music. He could feel the emotion of the composer. He loved to play the piano and the organ. He loved to listen to music. Because of this love of music and their anxiety about the decline of the rich tradition of sacred music, the University is inaugurating a new Master's program in sacred music to augment our initiatives in theological education. This program will be named for Carolyn's mother and father and will be known as The Townsend Program of Sacred Music.

This initiative in sacred music reflected, in part, Jim's impatience with what I call "Saturday Night Live" religion. He was not much into entertainment religion that reduces faith to mindless trivialities and sacred music to singing 26 stanzas of "Let us behold him."

Jim McAfee was my friend. He was a collector of friends. Some people collect stamps, others coins, others automobiles. Jim collected friends. And once you were in the orbit of Jim's friendship, you were there for all time. High school classmates and distinguished corporate executives were friends for life. But I

must add another word. Jim and Carolyn and Tom are like family to many of us at Mercer. Our relationship has been nurtured by our common ground of Mercer University. Jim, as a Trustee and former Chairman of Mercer's Board, has counseled us wisely about the affairs of the University, but if you know Mercer and you know Jim and Carolyn, you know that they became the heartbeat of the James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology. This idea of preparing young men and women for ministry captured their imagination. They have embraced the School with far more than resources with which they have been magnificently generous. They have been present each step of the School's young history, challenging faculty and inspiring students. I believe Mercer's School of Theology is becoming the most prominent school of divinity among Baptists in the nation, and I believe that is true, because of the leadership, the guidance, and the friendship of Jim and Carolyn McAfee.

Every person's life is a story. There are no uninteresting stories and there are certainly no unimportant stories. Jim's story was more interesting and more important than most.

Today, we gather at the side of Carolyn and Tom and Julie to celebrate and to give thanks for the story of James Thomas McAfee. If we are wise, we will be inspired to learn more about our own stories and we may be challenged to see our own histories in a different light.

One lesson we can learn from this Christian gentleman who was father and husband, and a corporate executive, a neighbor and friend, churchman and mentor to his son and even to his daughter-in-law, Julie — one lesson that we can learn is

that every person's life is a gift.

When it comes to people, there are no reprints, no Xerox copies, no duplicates.

So, we would miss the most important lesson in Jim's story unless we are reminded of our own special gifts. You and I, like Jim, stand in a singular, unduplicated place on the stage of human history. Whenever you and I fail to fulfill the promise of our lives, that promise simply remains unfilled — forever. So, in our morning of mourning, let us remember that Jim lived life to the limits. He was a special gift, and so are you.

We should learn as well from Jim's story that life cannot

be counted by the clock. Jim succeeded, better than most, in making time his servant and not his master. Let us learn today in the celebration of Jim's life and the facing of his death that life is not mostly about time.

The certainty of one more day will be of little value if we delude ourselves into thinking that "one more day" represents the human triumph.

Our recollections of Jim should teach us that being here with one another, embracing one another, believing in one another — there lies the human triumph. It is the love we share, the hope we engender, and the capacity of one person to make a difference. These are the human triumphs, and these are triumphs which clocks and calendars can never measure.

Finally, let us learn today as we hold on to one another in this place of holy rest, that in our letting go of Jim, and letting go will require the greatest courage, let us learn, above all else, that we are all children of grace. Our personal histories carry us down many different roads. Our lives and our histories are often jolted by

the unexpected. None of us, not even Jim, is able to see the roads we travel with unclouded vision. We are all blind in certain places. So, as good as he was, Jim was not always right and surely he did not always see the world clearly. No, he as you and I, was ultimately a man who lived under the mantle of grace.

There is no greater gift of grace than our deep and profound connections with each other. Living with grace means caring about one another when things are good and when they are troubled. It means walking with one another when the road is smooth and when the road is broken and uphill.

Of one thing I am sure, Jim would be glad that we are together today. You Carolyn and you Tom and yes, you Julie were light and strength and hope in his life. And this very family of friends who surround you here and who are deeply saddened and stunned by his death were, for Jim, a reservoir of energy and encouragement.

Our highest and most noble tribute to Jim's presence with us will be to embrace life with the profound spirit of faith and hope that enabled him, over

and over again, to make a difference. Let us be heartened by his hope. Let us be strengthened by his resolve. Let us be inspired by his faith. And in so doing, may God grant us the wisdom and the courage to claim the power and the promise of our own lives.

Amen.



Enjoying the reception following the naming and dedication of the Neva Langley Fickling Recital Hall in the McCorkle Music Building were, from left, President Kirby Godsey, Bob Hatcher, Bill Fickling, Jim McAfee, David Hudson, Reg Murphy, Bob Steed and Jim Bishop.



Dean Alan Culpepper hooded Jim McAfee during the inaugural commencement exercises for McAfee School of Theology, as he received the doctor of laws degree from Mercer University.



The 2001 President's Club event was held at the Atlanta Botanical Gardens. Carolyn and Jim McAfee enjoyed the scenery of the event that featured music and casual dinner.

An audio tape of the memorial service for James T. McAfee Jr. is available to anyone wishing a copy. You may request one by contacting Shawna Dooley at (800) 837-2911 or E-mail dooley_sr@mercer.edu.