



A Sacred SPACE

By **Cyndi Gammill**

My family began attending Dawson Memorial Baptist Church when we moved to Birmingham in 1952 when my father was transferred here with his job. I was six years old. The church campus looked very different then. I went to Sunday School in the Fieldstone Building, which was located where the East Wing and Arendall Building is today. My sister, Glenda, went to the nursery in a house where our West Wing is currently located.

The outside of the Sanctuary has not changed much since that time. It is still the same beautiful Georgian brick building with the big white columns. However, the inside has gone through many changes. At that time, there was a back balcony but no side lower or upper transepts. The baptistry also has a different look.

Before the beautiful stained glass window was installed in 2008, there were curtains. Throughout the years, the curtains were changed to different colors depending on the color of the carpet. That baptistry holds a very special place in my heart. Not only were my husband, George, and I baptized there after we made our public professions of faith in Jesus, four generations of our family were also baptized here.

My father, Ralph (Chick) Durham was baptized at the same time I was baptized. He had grown up in a Christian home but had never been baptized. So, he and I “walked the aisle” together, and Dr. Arendall baptized us at the same time. That was a very special time for both me and my dad. Our daughter, Ginny, was also baptized here, as were her children, our grandchildren, Will and Bella Bourland.

The Sanctuary is not only a beautiful place to worship, but it holds so many memories for our family. I think my first memory is marching in as a group for Vacation Bible School. Then there were many choir programs and GA programs as I was growing up.

George and I were married in our Sanctuary in 1969. A few years ago, on our 50th anniversary, we renewed our vows in that exact same spot. We have been blessed to see our children, Greg and Ginny, and our grandchildren participate in the many choir programs and the girls and boys missions programs held in the Sanctuary each year.

Along with the happy times experienced in the Sanctuary that have brought us much joy, there have been times when just being there has helped comfort us. Within its walls, we have had Celebration of Life services for both sets of our parents, and for our precious daughter, Ginny. The presence of God was so evident to us during these times as we were surrounded by His peace and love, as well as the love of our family and friends.

Historically, the word sanctuary has religious roots. Originally from the Latin word *sanctus* or holy, it is a place set apart from the ordinary. Dawson's Sanctuary is that to us and so much more. It has certainly been a place where our family has worshipped and grown closer to God. It has been a place of refuge, comfort, and security for our family for four generations. To us, it has stood as a beacon of hope inviting all who enter to worship the one true Hope. How thankful we are that this beloved, sacred space is where our family of faith gathers together each week as God's beloved people.



Cyndi Gammill and her family have been Dawson members for four generations. She was baptized at Dawson, met her husband George here, and they were married in the Sanctuary 56 years ago. Currently, she sings in the Sanctuary Choir and Dawsonaires and serves at Kids Connection. She has also served with other Dawson ministry teams at the Firehouse Ministries Soup Kitchen for more than 30 years.



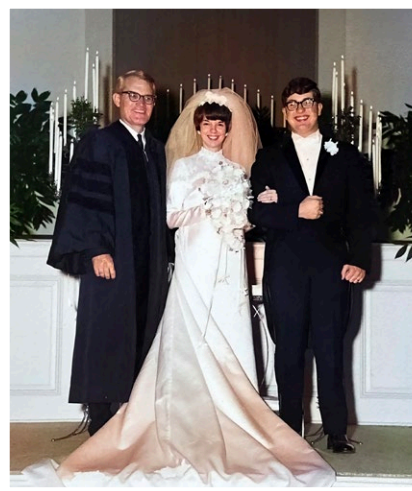
Cyndi Gammill models for *Tell* magazine (1958), a national missions magazine for girls.



Ginny Gammill with dad George and Tim Byrd, during a 1989 missions recognition ceremony.



Ralph and Virginia Durham, Cyndi & George Gammill, Charles and Kitty Gammill in 1969.



Cyndi and George Gammill with Dr. Arendall.



Renewing their vows 50 years later.