



**Gardner, Van William, Dr.**

1954-2022

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Dr. Van William Gardner was born April 14, 1954, to James William (Bill) and Ruth (Spain) Gardner in Clinton, Okla. Aug. 14, 1976, he married the love of his life, Debbie Shaw Gardner in Decatur, where they chose to live their lives.

Dr. Gardner graduated from Decatur High School in 1972. He attended Texas A&M University and graduated with honors in the Centennial Class of 1976. He completed his Master of Education degree at Sam Houston State University in 1977, Doctorate in Education in 1991 and a Ph.D. in Religion in 1993. He served as Academic Dean and later Executive Vice-President of Trinity Valley Baptist Seminary and College for five years.

Dr. Gardner entered the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in January 1980 and has served in some capacity in Baptist churches until he went home to be with our Lord July 11, 2022.

In February 1996, Dr. Gardner was led to become the founding pastor of Grace Baptist Church of Decatur until his retirement in October 2019.

In 1997, he had the opportunity to return to Decatur High School and teach World Geography, World History, and his love, American History for three years before moving into administration. He served at Rann and Carson Elementary campuses and retired as principal of Decatur Middle School in 2008.

Dr. Gardner was also called to serve as a member of the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons for 46 years and is a past Master of Decatur and Greenwood Masonic Lodges. He served as District Deputy Grand Master of Masonic District 87 in 1983. He was a member of the Decatur Lions Club for 23 years. Dr. Gardner loved the history of the Wise County Old Settlers Reunion, attending and serving on the Reunion Committee for 21 years.

He loved music and enjoyed the historic American Mountain Dulcimer developed in the Appalachian Mountains. He utilized his dulcimer in the ministry for many years and loved his dear friends in the Heart Strings and performing with them throughout Wise and surrounding counties. He also played with the Hymn Keepers taking the traditional hymns of our faith to shut-ins, hospitals, rest homes, hospice patients and anywhere there was a need. In May 2021, Dr. Gardner was named the Texas Mountain Dulcimer Champion at the competition in Glen Rose.

Dr. Gardner considered the birth of our Lord Jesus the most important day in all of history, consequently he relished the Christmas season, which for him began in early October each calendar year. Christmas music and Christmas cheer was in his heart and life year-round.

Dr. Gardner loved his family with all of his heart and loved his friends just the same. In fact, if he met you, he loved you. He was preceded in death by twin infant sons, Jeremy Kent and Jerrod Thomas Gardner; and his parents, Bill and Ruth Gardner.

He has left behind to cherish his memory, his dear wife of 45 years, Debbie Gardner; his sons, Van William Gardner II and wife, Amanda, John Cody Gardner and wife, Macy, and Brett Andrew Gardner and wife, Brittany, all of Decatur; his grandchildren, Blaine Rylan Gardner of Argyle, William Connor Gardner, James Aiden Gardner, Kylee Jane Gardner, Alexis Kate Gardner and Emory Annette Gardner, all of Decatur; his sisters, Rebecca Davis and husband, Jeff, of Copperas Cove, Shauna Paque and husband, Brian, of Jacksonville; brothers, Steven Gardner of Valencia, Spain and Kenneth Rouivere and wife, Leddy, of Wilburton, Okla.; as well as a host of family, friends and loved ones.

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