Obituary

George Walter Harper Jr.

of Mesquite, Texas

George Walter Harper Jr. was born in Birmingham, Ala., to George Walter Harper Sr. and Eleanor Jeanne Harper, née Simmons, on May 25, 1952. He spent most of his childhood in Center Point, a suburb of Birmingham, graduating in 1970 from Indian Springs School, a private prep school located in Helena, Alabama. At Indian Springs he was a member of the school’s first math team and sang baritone in its glee club. After graduation he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Mass., receiving his S.B. in Humanities and Science in 1979. His undergraduate thesis, on Cotton Mather’s approach to pastoral ministry, would provide the foundation for the first chapter of his Ph.D. dissertation.

As a child, George had been brought to church services, generally three times a week, by his mother, a devout member of the Churches of Christ. During his early years at MIT, a spiritual crisis led him to embrace an understanding of faith that put its stress on the idea of trusting commitment rather than legalistic obedience. Having made a commitment to Christ, he found his faith strengthened and his life transformed through his involvement in the college-age and young adult ministries of Park Street Church, in Boston. It was at Park Street that he met the love of his life, Anne Catherine Oakley. He and Anne were married on March 18, 1978.

Discerning a call to the ordained ministry, in 1979 George began work on his M.Div. at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, in South Hamilton, Mass. In 1983 he graduated magna cum laude and began work on his Ph.D. in Religious Studies at Boston University. In June 1986 he was ordained a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and for 19 years he was a member of the PC(USA)’s Boston Presbytery, serving for six years on its New Church Development Subcommittee. He transferred to Mission Presbytery in South Texas in 2005, then in 2021 to Grace Presbytery in Metro Dallas.

In 1993 George and Anne joined Action International Ministries, a nondenominational faith mission, beginning their ministry as missionary academics the following year. George’s first faculty appointment was at Alliance Biblical Seminary, in Manila, Philippines, where from 1994 to 2001 he was Assistant, then Associate, Professor of Christian History and Thought. From 2001 to 2005 he was Professor of Christian History and Thought with the Asia Graduate School of Theology-Philippines, a consortium of evangelical seminaries affiliated with the Asia Theological Association. He helped to establish and lead the AGST’s Th.M./Ph.D. program in Theological Studies.

From 2005 to 2010 George and Anne served in Eastern Europe. He was Professor of Christian History and Theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary, in Osijek, Croatia, again helping to establish and lead ETS’s Ph.D. program in Theological Studies. In 2010 he and Anne returned to the Philippines, where he served as Program Director of the AGST’s Th.M./Ph.D. programs in Theological Studies and Church History. In 2011 he was appointed editor of the Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology, a publication of the Asia Theological Association. He also took a position on the faculty of the Biblical Seminary of the Philippines. In 2020 he resigned his position as Program Director, but he continued in his other positions until his death.

George’s research focused especially on the churches of New England and the theology and history of church renewal. An edited version of his Ph.D. dissertation, “Boston’s Congregational Churches and Their Pastors, 1710-1760,” was published in 2004 by the University Press of America as A People So Favored of God: Boston’s Congregational Churches and Their Pastors, 1710-1760; a revised edition was published in 2007 by Wipf & Stock. His articles appeared in a number of publications, including the New England Quarterly, the Westminster Theological Journal, the Journal of Ecumenical Studies, and the Evangelical Review of Theology.

George is survived by his wife, Anne C. Harper; their daughters, Ruth Harper, of Mesquite, Tex., and Margaret (Meg) Harper, of Dallas, Tex.; their son-in-law, Michael Gratkowski, of Dallas, Tex.; and his brothers, Ronald (Ron) Harper, of Murfreesboro, Tenn., and Robert Harper of Manchester, Tenn.



I am sad to share that my father, [George Harper](https://www.facebook.com/george.harper.35?__cft__%5b0%5d=AZVMINHwnlDl-p2kgncd1LmEwrA10EoNPRzBY2Ec5C1TVit10ZOqLnidsMhAJR9jnphIcP0tF6eR4MN0oR5MfiOraCJ7AXcmoxhNgwLQsNTw2WYsY84CSGW-qQwCULYqC6Vqm0whd2vKdd8vW5oLGj3G&__tn__=-%5dK-R), passed away yesterday morning in his sleep. For my whole life, I looked up to and wanted to be like my father. He was a brilliant man, always reading and learning about a myriad of subjects - history, culture, news, arts, space, cars, and more. He was also humble, always willing to re-examine his assumptions. From my childhood onward, he modeled self awareness and humility by apologizing to me whenever he realized he had been wrong. He was a man of deep and abiding faith. He loved music and the arts - he’s a big part of why I became a musician. And he had the best sense of humor, replete with dad jokes and puns. He was the person to whom I felt closest, and who I always felt understood me more than anyone else did. I loved my father dearly, and I miss him more than I can say.

Here is the announcement of his passing from my mother, along with information about the funeral for those who wish to attend:

Dear friends,

I’m sorry to have to share the news that George passed away yesterday, Thursday morning, March 16, two days shy of our 45th wedding anniversary. He never fully recovered from COVID and had become very weak with increased difficulty breathing. It was an answer to prayer that he passed quickly and didn’t suffer longer. I know that he is with his beloved Lord, Jesus, and singing again with a new voice.

We have scheduled his funeral and interment of ashes for Friday, March 31, at 11:00 am, at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Dallas (8011 Douglas Ave.).

Any who wish to join us are welcome to attend. A reception will follow the service. Please let me know at gaharper@gmail.com if you plan to attend.

Many will have questions about me and what I intend for the future. For now, I will continue to work with our mission, ACTION International Ministries seconded to the Asia Graduate School of Theology and the Asia Theological Association until retirement on June 30 of this year. My mission account will remain open beyond that for those who want to assist me in retirement (see link below).

In lieu of flowers, George requested that memorial gifts be made to the account of our beloved former students, Tara and Arati Kathayat, CRU, who are the National Directors of Campus for Christ in Nepal. Their ministry is reaching Nepalis with the Good News, teaching and training. You can give them to at: [https://give.cru.org/search-results.html?q=Kathayat](https://give.cru.org/search-results.html?q=Kathayat&fbclid=IwAR2Lmy5AlPhXw6zu204JsU_oG-QdkG6mo-W7_nr8HZmI4eEAA42KW0OsHdE)

Or, you can give to my mission account with ACTION International Ministries, [https://www.actioninternational.org/.../Dr-George-and-Dr...](https://www.actioninternational.org/missionary/Dr-George-and-Dr-Anne-Harper?fbclid=IwAR3XLTZtjdxKKaPFmSOm7cYFA_ntdT67YD6dGfSQFlfaKge6GwWVTS9sMqY). George wanted to make sure that I was provided for if he passed first.

Here is my dad’s obituary, which he wrote himself: