

Deaths

News in the [May 18, 2010](#) issue

Civil rights icon and Baptist minister **Benjamin Hooks**, 85, died April 15 in Memphis, Tennessee. The former executive director of the NAACP was pastor of Greater Middle Baptist Church in Memphis for 52 years before retiring in 2008. For 30 of those years, 1964–1994, he served simultaneously as pastor at Greater New Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit, preaching on alternate Sundays in Michigan and Tennessee while leading the NAACP from 1977 to 1992. Trained as a lawyer, Hooks in 1965 became the first black judge in the South since Reconstruction. He was also the first African-American to serve on the Federal Communications Commission.

Dorothy Height, 98, called by one admirer “the queen mother of the civil rights movement,” died April 20 in Washington, D.C. When Martin Luther King Jr. gave his historic “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963, Height was the only woman, besides Mrs. King, invited onto the platform. When Barack Obama was sworn in as the nation’s first African-American president 46 years later, she appeared on the platform again. Height, a United Methodist who worked tirelessly on behalf of equality for women, headed the National Council of Negro Women for more than 40 years. She received the Presidential Citizen Medal from Ronald Reagan in 1989, the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Bill Clinton in 1994 and the Congressional Gold Medal from George W. Bush in 2004. She was a colleague of King and an admired strategist in the civil rights struggles.

Cecil Sherman, 82, one of the most visible moderate leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention controversy of the 1980s and first coordinator of the breakaway Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, died April 17 at Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia. He had suffered a massive heart attack two days before. “Baptists have lost a great champion, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has lost its founding coordinator and I have lost a friend,” said Daniel Vestal, executive coordinator of the Atlanta-based fellowship. During the acrimonious struggle for control of the nation’s largest denomination, Sherman was a pastor in Asheville, North Carolina, and Dallas, Texas, but was on the losing side in the end.

When disenfranchised moderates formed their own organization in 1990, they turned to Sherman. At the start, he was one of three staff members. At his retirement in 1996, the CBF had 25 staffers and nearly 1,500 churches.

Tributes from church leaders have poured in for **Wilma Mankiller**, an American Indian rights advocate and the first female Cherokee, chief who died April 6 at 64 after a brief illness. She was to have been a keynote speaker at the June 18-28 global assembly in Grand Rapids, Michigan, of the merging World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council. In 1987, she was the first woman elected as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. In 1993, Mankiller was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, and in 1998 she was presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Bill Clinton. "Chief Mankiller's dedication to the rights of indigenous peoples would have brought an important challenge to all of our churches to act with justice on behalf of the First Peoples of our various countries," said event organizer Stephen Kendall of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

United Methodist bishop **Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa**, 84, described as one of the past century's champions for the liberation of Africans from colonialism, died April 8 at his home in a suburb of Harare, Zimbabwe. He was suffering from cancer. Appointed in 1968 as one of the church's first African bishops, Muzorewa emerged as a national leader in Rhodesia's struggle toward full independence. In 1970, Muzorewa was elected prime minister of Zimbabwe Rhodesia. But he held the post for less than a year; civil war broke out and in elections in 1980, Robert Mugabe emerged as the winner and has held office ever since. In 1983, Muzorewa was detained for ten months without trial by the government, but later said he had forgiven those responsible, according to the United Methodist News Service. He retired in 1992.