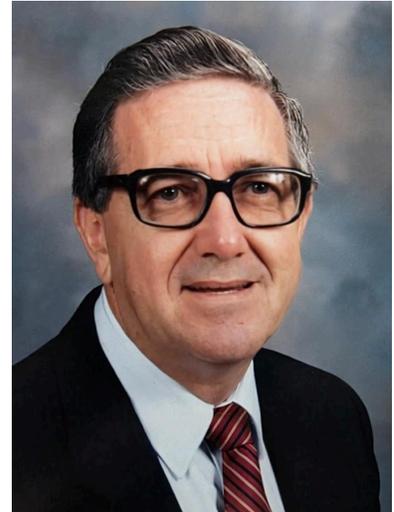


Eddie J. Payne of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, passed from this life to his heavenly home on February 23, 2026, at the age of 86. Born July 27, 1939, in Decatur, Arkansas, he was the oldest of four children in a close-knit family. The Paynes moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, when he was in the fifth grade. His reputation as a budding artist grew in high school to the point that he was offered a four-year scholarship to a Missouri art college. Because Eddie felt the Lord was calling him into ministry, he turned down the art scholarship and moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to prepare for pastoral and missionary service at Free Will Baptist Bible College (now Welch College).



While in college, he met the love of his life, Sandra Dawson, who was preparing to be a missionary in Africa. They married in 1960, embarking on a 64-year adventure of serving the Lord together. Eddie engaged wholeheartedly in every job the Lord gave him over the decades: pastoring in Tennessee during college; serving as a missionary to Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa (1962-1988); teaching mission students full-time at Welch College (1990-1995); and acting as Director of Mobilization and Recruitment for Free Will Baptist International Missions (1996-2005). In each of those endeavors, he made it his life's priority to share the Good News of salvation in Christ and to help believers find their place of service in God's Kingdom. He fervently prayed and worked so that every ethnic group on earth could hear of his Savior.

Eddie was known for his servant spirit, warm personality, wise counsel, and fantastic storytelling abilities. A genuine concern for people caused even strangers to feel at ease and share their hurts with him. His active imagination enabled him to draw a comic called **Payne's People** and write a novel about the creation from the perspective of a talking animal, **Naados and His Kin**. Grandchildren eagerly clamored for his stories in the car or his nighttime shadow puppet shows. His quick wit, wise words, and faithful prayers will be sorely missed by family and friends.

Eddie was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Sandra Payne; parents, Carl and Octavia Payne; brothers Carl Lee (Claudia) Payne and Tommy Payne; sister Nancy Medlin; and great-grandchildren Raymond Cordes, Iris Cordes, and Hal Anderson. He leaves behind to cherish his example: daughters Laura Stafford and Debbie (Verlin) Anderson; grandchildren Whitney (Cliff) Cordes, Cason (Suzanne) Anderson, Cara Anderson, Stuart Stafford, Corbin Anderson, Lydia (Braedon) Nielsen, and Isabella Stafford; great-grandchildren Chelsea Anderson, Elliot Cordes, Ian Cordes, Scarlett Nielsen, Wyn Anderson, and Finnick Nielsen; and extended family.

To honor Eddie in a lasting way, friends are invited to designate gifts to the “[Eddie Payne Memorial Leadership Fund](#)” at IM. These donations will help train future Ivorian believers as pastors, missionaries, and active lay people. One of Eddie’s passions was equipping the saints.

