



# SMU | PERKINS

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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## **Elizabeth Perkins Prothro, Longtime Benefactor of Perkins School of Theology and Southern Methodist University, Dies**

*Dallas, Texas* –Elizabeth Perkins Prothro, a longtime benefactor of Southern Methodist University, died May 23 in Wichita Falls. Mrs. Prothro was the daughter of the late Joe J. and Lois Perkins, who were founding contributors to SMU in 1913, and later, in the early 1940s, endowed the SMU School of Theology, which in 1945 was named in their honor.

“Elizabeth Prothro has left an indelible mark on SMU and on all who knew her,” said SMU President R. Gerald Turner. “Her contributions to this University and to its students, faculty and staff are truly historic. We join the Perkins-Prothro family in mourning her passing, but also in celebrating her extraordinary life.”



Services were held Tuesday, May 26, at the First United Methodist Church in Wichita Falls.

In January 2007, Mrs. Prothro, with the Perkins-Prothro Foundation, provided the lead gift of \$6 million to help launch a building program for the Perkins School of Theology at SMU. The plans involved the construction of a new 20,000 square foot facility to be named Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Hall in her honor. The new facility includes cloisters connecting the building with Seleman and Kirby Halls, and an outdoor labyrinth. A ribbon cutting and dedication of the new building are scheduled for the morning of September 11, 2009. SMU will honor Mrs. Prothro's contributions with a celebration of her life following the September dedication.

Including the \$6 million gift, the Perkins and Prothro families and their foundations have given more than \$36.3 million to SMU since the first gift from her parents two years before the University opened in 1915. Most of the family's support has been for Perkins School of Theology, including its Bridwell Library, but other gifts have been designated for the Perkins Administration Building and Perkins Natatorium.

Mrs. Prothro was a member of SMU's class of 1939, having earned a Bachelor of Arts in government and political science. She and her husband, Charles, who preceded her in death in 2001, provided some \$7 million in gifts to the Perkins School of Theology in 1997, including funds for endowed scholarships, renovation of Perkins Chapel and a permanent collection of rare Bibles and related works spanning eight centuries.

Her rare Bible collection began in 1963 when Charles presented four such volumes as a gift for their 25th wedding anniversary. Throughout the following years, she accrued an outstanding collection of almost 500 volumes representing 100 languages and ranging from medieval manuscripts to 20th-century artists' Bibles.

The Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Galleries in Bridwell Library were another gift from Charles that he gave to her in celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary. Mrs. Prothro's Bible collection was the inaugural exhibition in the galleries in 1989. The collection was finally given in 1996 as a permanent collection to Bridwell Library and represented one of the finest private collections of Bibles in existence.

Mrs. Prothro was an SMU Trustee from 1972-87 and was named a trustee *emeritus* in 1991. She was a founding member of the boards of Perkins School of Theology and Colophon/Friends of the SMU Libraries and later served on the Texas Committee of The Campaign for SMU, which raised over \$500 million for the University between 1997 and 2002.

Among her many honors are the 1978 SMU Distinguished Alumni Award and honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree in 1996. Also in 1996, she and her husband jointly received SMU's Mustang Award, which recognizes longtime service and philanthropy to the University. The Perkins-Prothro family, including Mrs. Prothro, was honored in 2004 with the Medallion of Merit from the Texas Methodist Foundation for their contributions and service to the Foundation and The United Methodist Church.

*Perkins School of Theology, founded in 1911, is one of five official University-related schools of theology of The United Methodist Church. Degree programs include the Master of Divinity, Master of Sacred Music, Master of Theological Studies, Master of Church Ministries, and Doctor of Ministry, as well as the Ph.D., in cooperation with SMU's Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences.*