

# Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

No one can be saved without receiving the gospel. They must read about Jesus or hear about Jesus to be saved. We cannot live lives so pious and pure that they can see enough gospel in us to be saved. Someone has to tell them.

And that is where preaching comes in. As a child I was taught to love and respect preachers. They had status in the church, in the community and in our home. However I learned rather soon that some preachers had more opportunities and influence than others. By my teenage years I realized that came from perception, trust and faithfulness. And when I think of those qualities three remarkable preachers come to my mind. Two of them I have written about before and the third one is my subject for this writing.

Carlton Watson Todd (1916-1998) was pastor of four different Baptist churches, in three different states (Florida, Georgia, Alabama) for an average of 50 years each; at the same time. Can you imagine?

Ben Jones (1924-) was pastor of West Park Baptist Church in Jacksonville for 58 years. Ben saw children and grandchildren of church members saved. He was gracious, kind and a loving pastor. Ben is now 90 years old and retired in Jacksonville.

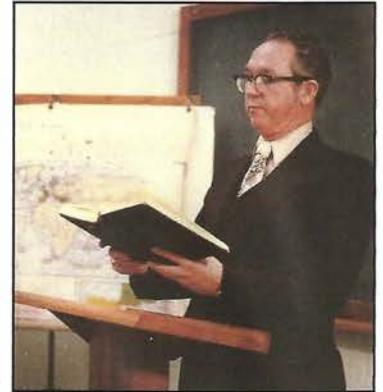
Carlton Todd had the broad ministry. Ben Jones had the deep ministry. Now let me tell you about one who has had a wide ministry.



Walter Wiley Richards was born June 25, 1932, in the Pleasant Grove community near Pensacola, Florida. He was one of six children and he graduated from Pensacola High School in 1950. He served in the United States Navy and married Betty Hargrave Richards and they have four children (Glenn, Roger, Regina and Charlene). Wiley graduated from Howard College, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (B.D., Th. D.) and Florida State University (Ph. D.).

Carlton Todd served broad. Ben Jones served deep and Wiley Richards served wide. In his preaching and teaching ministry Wiley Richards served 50 different interims. Todd and Jones have preaching records but so does Richards. Wiley is the only preacher I have ever heard of who served 50 interims (1955-2014). These interims came about primarily in his preaching ministry while serving 34 years as a professor at The Baptist College of Florida (BBI, FBTC, BCF). He taught by day and preached by day and night.

Wiley has four basic rules as an interim pastor. (1) First come first served. He has chosen not to compare churches. He chose to serve in the first church that called him regardless of the size of the church. (2) The church set the pay. Wiley never demanded or told a church what he should be paid as an interim. He felt he could trust God and Baptist churches. (3) He felt responsible for



Wiley Richards-1975

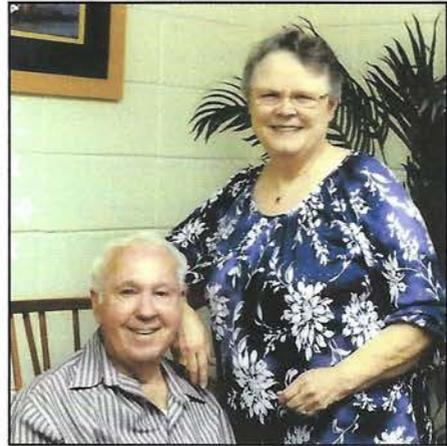
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all pulpit guests and speakers when he was interim. He made the request that he be allowed to choose pulpit guests without congregational vote. (4) He also had the rule that he would not be a candidate for the pastorate in a church where he was called to an interim ministry. These four basic rules may seem simple and not important but I would contend they are at the heart of the success of the historical record set by Wiley. He saw ministry as a calling and undertook it with a servant's heart. This authentic and humble approach was the foundation of an interim ministry that has included 50 interims in three different states.

V. L. Stanfield advised preachers to "write out your sermons." Wiley took that to heart and has fifteen books of sermon manuscript material that he has written out by hand since the 1962 Stanfield admonition. Since childhood Wiley has had a love of the scripture and his favorite preaching books have been Romans, John and Revelation. Roland Q. Leavell modeled a "soul winners heart" and Clayton Waddell emphasized family and morality. Therefore Bible, evangelism, ethics and theology have been focal points in his preaching and teaching.

Wiley said of his 50 interims the longest was four years and the shortest was six weeks. He attends a Sunday School class where he preaches and feels a need to be pastor to all and especially to those who are infirmed, grieving and hurting. He has chosen to be a friend to the lost and a leader for the saved.



Wiley and Betty Richards

In his record setting interim ministry one stands out to me. In 2006-2007, he was interim at First Baptist Church, Graceville where he and Betty are members. Therefore my friend became my pastor for an interim period. They served as a team and did a wonderful job leading our church.

It is my belief that Todd, Jones and Richards never set out to make Kingdom records. Yet in their faithfulness their ministry impacted thousands of people in their unique ministries that were broad, deep and wide.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor  
Secretary-Treasurer  
Matthew 6:33