



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,

Christians like to celebrate. The Bible is full of joyous occasions when special days, events and personalities were acknowledged. Florida Baptists are not exceptions to this Biblical concept of joy and celebration. A dear friend of Florida Baptists has recently hit a milestone worth noting.

Vanita Baldwin, family and friends recently celebrated the occasion of her 90th birthday. Vanita was born in 1926, in Oak Hill, Florida. Her parents were Van Buren and Mary Mosley Baldwin, Sr. She had two brothers; V.B. Baldwin, Jr., and Charles, and Vanita had sisters Florence, Jeanne and Francis. Vanita, finished high school at New Smyrna Beach, College at Stetson, graduate work at Duke, seminary at Southwestern and was granted an Honorary Doctor of Divinity from Stetson in 1990.



Vanita Baldwin

Vanita served as a public school teacher at New Smyrna Beach and the Panama Canal Zone from 1948-1953. She was associate WMU Director of the Alabama WMU from 1955-1961. She then served as WMU Director of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico from 1961-1977, and WMU Director of the Florida Baptist Convention from 1977-1991. She retired in December, 1991.

It has been my privilege to know Vanita for many years. Every person who has ever known her has been influenced by her and my observations may not be unique, but they are from the perspective of 34 years of listening and learning.

This Christian lady has had such impact upon so many that I want to point out some of her personal strengths that have been so impressive.

Vanita has shown a willingness to be obedient to Jesus Christ. That public commitment began at the Oak Hill Baptist Church in Halifax Association, and took another dramatic turn when she expressed her desire to follow Jesus Christ in a church-related vocation. This vocational turning point came when Vanita was teaching in the Panama Canal Zone and a member of Cocoli Baptist Church.

This obedience seems to have been born in the atmosphere of a Christian family and a Christian home environment. That may seem automatic, but too many children have rebelled from a spiritual upbringing to take this process for granted. Vanita has acknowledged her Christian heritage and was made grateful by it.

Vanita has also been a believer and promoter of the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program. This has not been some blind persuasion, but a heart felt conviction from her youth. Most of us as Southern Baptists have shared this conviction, but Vanita has used her stage for making a positive missions impact upon mission giving and spending.

Vanita has been a person of positive courage and focused opinion. Her life story and employment history show a trail of firm convictions, valid research and pinpointed observations. She has not always won her battles, but she always left a teachable moments in her wake.

Vanita has been a gifted speaker and promoter of Christian missions and Baptist work. I have known a number of preachers that were ready to tear up their papers when they first heard Vanita speak. I know she had "the gift," but my friend she also was well prepared and honed the gift.

In a tricky time of Baptist politics Vanita also promoted the New Testament role of women as capable servants and potential leaders. She nudged women to be better Christians and strong organizational proponents. WMU growth and mission giving increases are a part of her legacy.

I save my favorite for last. Vanita Baldwin was a good churchman. Vanita and Frances went to church. Southside in Jacksonville knows that, but Baptists across our state know it too.

Happy birthday and many best wishes are extended to a good lady and a dear Florida Baptist.

Honoring those who honor Christ,



Jerry M. Windsor
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Matthew 6:33
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Standing from left; Cindy Bradley, Ann Fuller Coffman, Anna Guy, Helen Yates, Clysta de Armas, Carol Vandeventer; and seated from left, Frances Shaw, Vanita Baldwin and Oma Del Ely