

# William Rice called to lead Calvary, Clearwater

CLEARWATER (FBW)—Calvary Baptist Church, Clearwater, called William (Willy) Rice as pastor Aug. 15. Rice grew up in the 5,600-member congregation, and was called to preach, licensed and ordained there. He has served as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Pensacola, since 1997.

Rice, a 40-year-old Tampa native, grew up in Pinellas County and graduated from Seminole High School. He graduated from Samford University, Birmingham, Ala., in 1985, and received the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1990 and 1996. During his college years, he served as a youth revival preacher

with the Alabama Baptist Convention Evangelism Department.

Before his pastorate at Hillcrest, he served as pastor at Gladeview Baptist Church, Anniston, Ala., 1992-1997; Cypress Lake Baptist Church, Tampa, 1987-1992; and Bethel Baptist Church, Dora, Ala., 1984-1987. Cypress Lake Baptist was a mission of Calvary, Clearwater.

"We are convinced that God has been preparing Dr. Rice to serve here," wrote Calvary's Pastor Search Committee in a letter to the congregation on the day Rice visited in view of call. In the same letter, the committee listed his being "raised at Calvary" and his Southern Baptist education, along with his "love for Christ and His people, relationship with his family, compassion for the lost and strategic vision" as factors in

its recommendation of Rice. The church voted to extend a call to Rice after the morning service Aug. 15.



RICE

Calvary's long-time pastor William (Bill) Anderson, 1975-2002, led the church to license and ordain Rice.

Rice told *Florida Baptist Witness* he considers Anderson "my father in the ministry." Although Rice says he looks forward to the future, he said, "It is an honor to follow his legacy."

Rice will succeed former pastor Jerry Tidwell and interim pastor Ken Alford.

Rice has been married almost 20 years to the former Cheryl Baker, who also grew up at Calvary Baptist and graduated from Samford University. They have three children, Amanda Leigh, Anna Ruth and Stephen Benjamin.

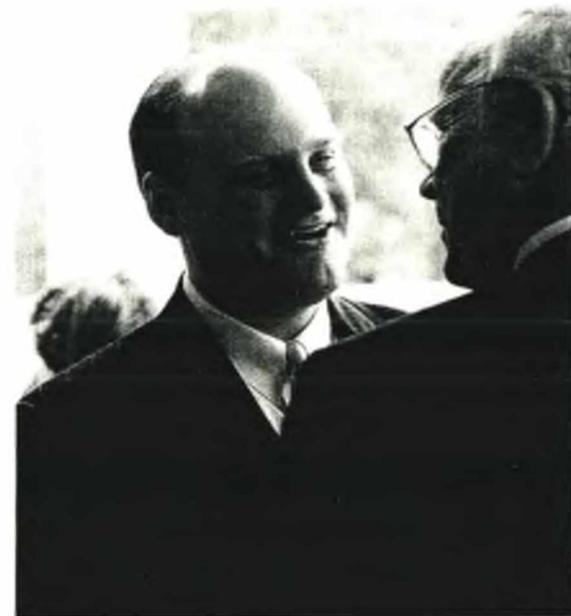
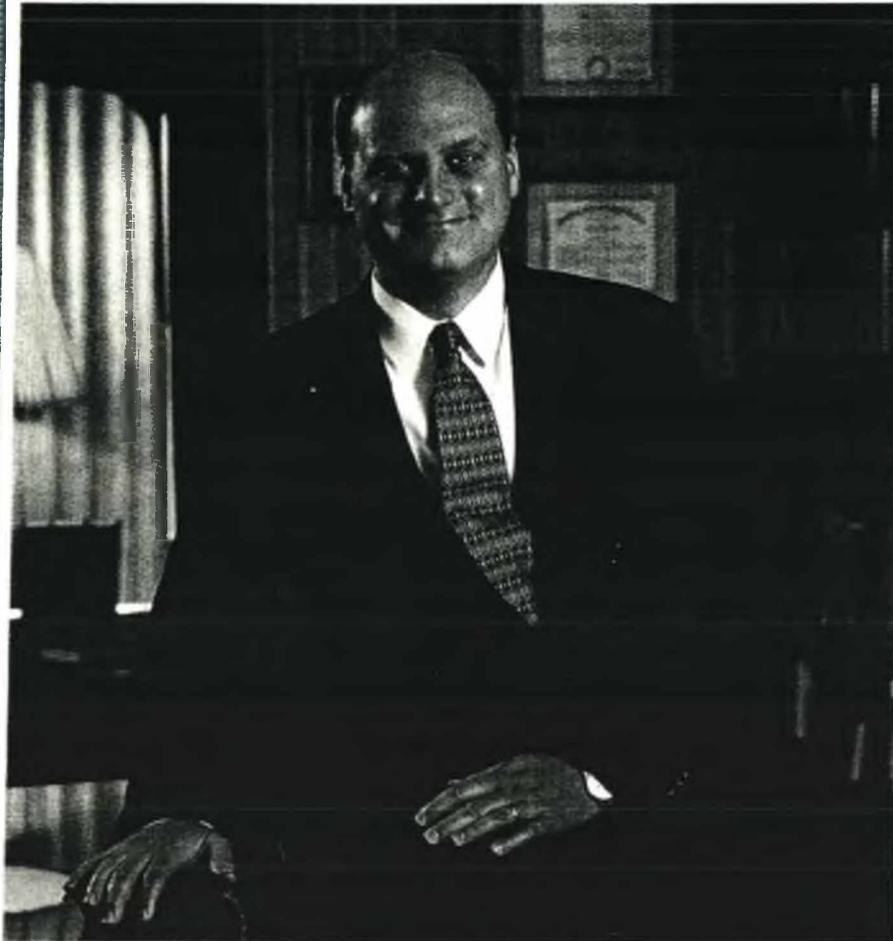
Sept. 2, 2004 Page 5 Fl. Bapt. Witness

## DOCTOR WILLIAM (WILLY) E. RICE

William (Willy) Rice is a native of Tampa, Florida. On the day of his birth his parents Ernest and Judith Rice enrolled him in Sunday School at Jackson Heights Baptist Church and that began a life-long love affair with the church. He grew up in Pinellas County, Florida, and graduated from Seminole High School. He has one sister, Sharon and one brother, David, who is also in the ministry.

Pastor Willy received Christ at the age of nine while attending revival services at the East Chelsea Baptist Church in Tampa with his maternal grandparents, Stephen and Evelyn New. Though it was the only decision made that night, it was a significant one as he showed a keen interest in the spiritual things of life from that point on. He became a leader in his youth group and in the summer after his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year he felt God's call to the pastoral ministry during a trip to Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center.

Acting on that sense of call, Willy left home at 17 to attend college at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. He graduated in 1985 and would later receive his Master of Divinity degree (1990) and his Doctor of Ministry degree (1996) from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was called, licensed, and ordained to the ministry





Willy Rice to bring Convention Sermon at FBSC  
By FBC\_Admin      Last updated Nov 4, 2016

William (Willy) Rice of Clearwater will deliver the historic Convention Sermon during the Florida Baptist State Convention meeting Nov. 14-15.

The annual meeting will be held at Calvary Baptist Church where Rice serves as senior pastor.

The preacher of the Convention Sermon is selected each year by the Committee on Order of Business. FBSC bylaws stipulate the Florida Baptist pastor must serve in a cooperating Florida Baptist church in the state for seven years; and must have a pastoral ministry that reflects effective leadership in outreach, Cooperative Program support and cooperation.

The Calvary pastor has served the 5,000-member Clearwater church since 2004, returning to the congregation he considers as his home church. Rice spent his high school years at Calvary, where he was called, licensed and ordained to preach under the leadership of William (Bill) Anderson, who pastored there for 27 years.

As the Convention Preacher, Rice is following in his mentor's footsteps. Anderson preached the Convention Sermon in 1981 in Orlando. It's a memory still fresh in Rice's mind.

"I attended my first Florida Baptist Convention as a college freshman," recalled Rice. "I sat on the platform representing the youth speaker's tournament from those days while my pastor, Dr. Bill Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, where I now serve as pastor, presented the convention sermon. I thought it was one of the greatest messages I had ever heard and I remember it still," he said.

"So many great preachers have stood to challenge our convention with God's word for the moment and I have personally been blessed by many of them. It is a great honor to bear that responsibility this year and to do so as Calvary hosts this year's meeting," Rice continued.

"We serve a God who speaks. He speaks through His perfect Word and His imperfect servants who proclaim it. I look forward to our time together and humbling ourselves before God to hear His Word."

Prior to returning to Calvary, Rice served as pastor of the Hillcrest Baptist Church in Pensacola, for seven years. During that time the church experienced great growth and more than doubled in size. The church built a new 2,000 seat worship center in 2002.

In earlier years, Rice served as pastor of Gladeview Baptist Church in Anniston, Ala. from 1992 to 1997; Cypress Lake Baptist Church in Tampa, from 1987 to 1992; and the Bethel Baptist Church in Dora, Ala., from 1984-1987.

He is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Divinity degree in 1990 and a Doctor of Ministry degree in 1996.

Rice is married to the former Cheryl Baker, whom he met at Calvary while in high school. They have three grown children.

# Florida pastor Willy Rice to be nominated for SBC president

By [Jonathan Howe](#), posted **March 2, 2022** in [Annual Meeting](#), [SBC News](#)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)—Willy Rice, pastor of Calvary Church in Clearwater, Fla., will be nominated by Clint Pressley, pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist, for the president of the Southern Baptist Convention **this summer at the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting** in Anaheim, Calif.

The announcement comes a day after current SBC President Ed Litton of Saraland, Ala., [announced](#) he will not seek a second term.

Rice, who has pastored Calvary since 2004, was a member of the church during high school, was called to ministry there, and met and married his wife, Cheryl, at the church.

“Willy Rice represents who Southern Baptists are at their best,” Pressley told Baptist Press in a statement. “He loves Southern Baptists, believes in Southern Baptists, and has demonstrated at every level of our convention his ability to lead Southern Baptists.”

Rice, a current trustee for the North American Mission Board, served as president of the Florida Baptist Convention from 2006-2008, served as president of the SBC Pastors’ Conference in 2015, chaired the 2010 SBC Committee on Committees and chaired the 2016 SBC Committee on Nominations. He also [delivered the convention sermon](#) at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting where Litton was elected.

“In his convention sermon at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting, Willy Rice issued a prophetic call to our Convention, warning us of the dual threats of theological drift and of a pharisaical spirit of pugilism and condescension,” Pressley said. “He is more than a statesman—he’s a man who understands the times, sees the challenges before us clearly, and has the vision, wisdom, and courage to lead us. I can say with all confidence that he is the man to meet the challenges of this moment.”

Rice’s “Great Commission passion” and “fierce dedication to Scripture” were also noted by Pressley.

During his tenure as pastor, Calvary has grown to include three campuses, and in 2016—the church’s sesquicentennial—the church adopted goals that included partnering through church planting and revitalization with 150 congregations across the country and around the world by 2025 as well as seeing members support 150 children through adoption or foster care.

To date, Calvary has been part of more than 90 church plants or revitalization efforts, and more than 50 families and 120 volunteers are involved with adoption and foster care. In addition, there are seven missionary units from Calvary on the field or in the appointment process with the International Mission Board.

**According to its Annual Church Profile statistics, Calvary reported 218 baptisms in 2021 and giving through the Cooperative Program of \$532,533.41, approximately 7.5% of its annual budget, along with Annie Armstrong Easter Offering giving of \$27,902.62 and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering giving of \$52,023.01 in 2020. Giving totals for 2021 have not yet been reported.**

Prior to the pandemic, the church averaged more than 3,600 people in weekly worship attendance across its three campuses.

Before coming to Calvary, Rice pastored churches in Florida and Alabama. He is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and has an M.Div. and a D.Min. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He and Cheryl have three children and six grandchildren.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR/JONATHAN HOWE**

Jonathan Howe is vice president for convention administration at the SBC Executive Committee.

## **Rice withdraws as SBC presidential candidate**

By Brandon Porter, *posted* **April 6, 2022** in SBC Annual Meetings, SBC News

CLEARWATER, Fla. (BP) – Florida pastor Willy Rice has announced he will not seek the nomination for SBC president at the upcoming 2022 SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim. The announcement followed a release from him on April 1 containing what he called “sensitive information” concerning a deacon at Calvary Church where he is senior pastor.

In a Twitter post on April 6, Rice said: “The last few days have been very difficult, and I’ve found myself in an untenable position of watching people I love in a church I love done immeasurable harm simply because my name was being considered for this office,”

Rice said in a statement released on social media. “My calling is to my local church, my family and to the mission field God has given me. I wish to return my time and attention to those things.”

In the video [April 1, 2022] released last week, Rice said “... a member of our deacon body committed sexual sin that could also be described as abusive.” He goes on to say, “It did not involve criminal charges, and he has never been identified by law as a sexual offender.”

According to the April 1 statement, the event occurred before the man was a Christian.

“After this event, he experienced as his own testimony has consistently stated, a genuine conversion to Christ. He repented of his sin. He trusted in Christ and he was baptized as a true follower of Jesus by God’s grace. His marriage survived. And several years after that, he came to Calvary, and he did not hide his story. It was a part of his testimony, and it was a story of God’s amazing grace,” Rice said.

Because of his past, the man was not allowed to serve in ministries aimed at children or youth, but actively served in other areas of the church, according to Rice.

“After several years of him being a faithful member in good standing and having served in multiple ways and having borne great fruit in his life, our church ordained this brother to the office of deacon, and there have been no issues during his service at our church,” Rice said.

Rice said the leadership at the church decided to take another look at the man’s ability to serve as a deacon at Calvary after he was contacted by a pastor from another state who had information about the event.

“We were challenged to think more accurately about our leadership structure and allowing him to serve as a deacon was inconsistent with our desire to stand against all forms of sexual abuse. We have all agreed that our brother should not continue to serve as a deacon at Calvary. Over the last three to four years, we have grown in our understanding of the dynamics of sexual abuse and predatory behavior,” Rice said.

Rice, a current trustee for the North American Mission Board, served as president of the Florida Baptist Convention from 2006-2008, as president of the SBC Pastors’ Conference in 2015, chaired the 2010 SBC Committee on Committees and chaired the 2016 SBC Committee on Nominations. He also delivered the convention sermon at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting where current SBC President Ed Litton was elected. Litton decided not to seek reelection.

Rice said church leadership at Calvary will improve the process for interviewing candidates for leadership in the church. “We will continue to perform background checks and require abuse prevention training for all our deacons, as well as our pastoral staff and volunteers. And in the future, we will go beyond previous guidelines and will include additional inquiries into any history of sexual abuse,” Rice promised in the video.

Looking back, Rice said the incident should have been labeled abuse rather than sexual misconduct. “We have learned so much in recent years about the dynamics of sexual abuse. We listen, we learn and we try to lead. We’ve learned a great deal about what should be categorized as abusive behavior, and we grieve that we did not recognize some of these things sooner and apologize for our lack of compassion or concern for the victim,” he said.

Messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting passed a resolution stating that “any person who has committed sexual abuse is permanently disqualified from holding the office of pastor,” and, further, that “we recommend that all of our affiliated churches apply this standard to all positions of church leadership.”

**In his withdrawal statement,** Rice also expressed hope that another candidate for president will emerge “whose ministry has been characterized by leading in the local church with a passion for the Great Commission.” He added that he will continue to serve the SBC and cooperative efforts when he can, but that his primary focus will be his church.

Tom Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist in Cape Coral, Fla., and Robin Hadaway, former IMB missionary and senior professor of missions at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, have announced intentions to seek the office of SBC president.

The 2022 SBC Annual Meeting is scheduled for June 14-15 at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, Calif.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR/BRANDON PORTER**

Brandon Porter serves as Vice President for Communications at the SBC Executive Committee.

## Florida pastor Willy Rice to be nominated for SBC president in Orlando

By **Brandon Porter**, posted **October 31, 2025** in **SBC Annual Meetings**, **SBC News**

CLEARWATER, Fla. (BP) – Florida pastor Willy Rice announced his intentions to be nominated as a candidate for Southern Baptist Convention president at the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando. In a video released Friday (Oct. 31, 2025), Rice said he is allowing the nomination based on his hope for renewal in the SBC.

Rice, 62, has served as senior pastor at Calvary Church in Clearwater for 21 years.

“Can you honestly look back over the last few years and conclude we are more united and more on mission? Or do you feel like I do? And like so many I hear from that there are real concerns that call for serious reflection, humble correction, and a new day of renewal,” Rice said in the video.

He said his focus would be on renewing the message and the mission of the Convention.

“In this hour of apostasy and idolatry, we need to reaffirm and restate our convictions. Such a time calls not for fuzzy lines in a mushy middle, it calls for clarity and courage. We don’t need to look for something new. We need to stand on what we know is true,” he said.

In 2022, now-SBC President Clint Pressley announced that he would nominate Rice for president at that year’s annual meeting in Anaheim, Calif., but Rice later decided not to seek the nomination.

Rice went on in Friday’s video to talk about the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Commission, which he said historians say will occur “somewhere around May of 2033.”

“What if as we approach that once-in-a-lifetime moment, Southern Baptists were to unite as never before to make sure every person in our nation heard the message of Jesus and was urged to respond in repentance and faith, and imagine Southern Baptists embracing a historic generational goal to get the Gospel into every tongue, every nation and every tribe across the globe,” he said.

Rice said that more than any other generation of Christians “we have all we need” for the mission.

“What we have lacked is the resolve, the vision, the unity, the focus and the commitment to see it through. We have allowed other pursuits to distract us and tainted ideologies to divide us,” he said.

Rice plans to hold “conversations” with Southern Baptists over the coming months to work through potential differences.

“I pray those conversations will be without unnecessary acrimony, that they will glorify our Savior and edify the Church,” he said in the video. “Regardless of your views, I hope you’ll join me in praying for a Baptist renewal in our time and praying specifically that our gathering next summer can be a time of reaffirming our convictions and recommitting to our shared mission.”

**According to its 2025 Annual Church Profile statistics and the church’s financial office, Calvary Church gave \$343,549 through the Cooperative Program, approximately 3 percent of its undesignated contributions, \$52,222 to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering giving and \$76,351 to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Calvary reported 409 baptisms in 2024 and 3,055 people in average worship attendance.**

Before coming to Calvary, Rice pastored churches in Florida and Alabama. He is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and has an M.Div. and a D.Min. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife Cheryl have three children and six grandchildren.

He served as president of the Florida Baptist Convention from 2006-2008, and he served as president of the SBC Pastors’ Conference in 2015. He has also served as Chairman of the SBC Committee on Committees (2010), Chairman of the SBC Committee on Nominations (2016), President of the Florida Baptist Convention Pastors’ Conference (2004) along with other local, state, and national positions.

Rice also served as a trustee for the North American Mission Board from 2018-2022, including stints as second and first vice chairman.

The 2026 SBC Annual Meeting is set for June 9-10 in Orlando at the Orange County Convention Center.