

Florida Baptist Historical Society Biography Collection

This link provides the specific resource information which documents and undergirds the biographical resource information on a specific Florida Baptist pastors, church staff or significant laity leaders.

The link you have chosen connects to the specific individual's resource files that provide the basis for information which the Historical Society has used to develop the respective biographical profile. The sources attached may include copies of articles gleaned from back issues of the *Florida Baptist Witness* and other news publications. Other resources include books, historical journal articles and church histories that are cited as documentation for the biography.

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Smith, Dwight L. (1940-2026) was the son of Virgil and Gladys Smith. He graduated from William Carey College New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Luther Rice Seminary. Smith served as pastor of churches in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida including First Baptist Church in Quincy, 1972-1979; First Baptist Church, Avon Park, 1979-1981 and Scott Lake Baptist Church, Lakeland. He and his first wife, Geri Smith (d. 1984), had three children. Smith later married Diane Walker Clayton Smith (m. 1987)



Dr. Dwight L. Smith passed away peacefully on the morning of April 23, 2026, at his home, surrounded by those who loved him. Survivors include his wife of over 39 years, Diane; children, Angie Smith, Bryan Smith, Bruce Smith and Allison (Mike) DeWitt. Grandchildren: Bethany Smith, Emily (Sam) Wilkerson, Walker DeWitt, Jordan Walters, Natalie DeWitt and Lindsey Smith, and great grandson, Micah Wilkerson, as well as, special family friends, Aleksey Biriukov, Inna and Maiia Biriukova. Brother, Mitchel Smith (Diane) and sister Laynea Harvill (John) and a host of nieces and nephews. Preceded by parents Virgil and Gladys Smith, first wife Geri Smith, 13 siblings, and daughter Lee Ann Clayton Walters.

Dwight served as pastor for over 60 years serving in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi, with 16 years at West Ellisville Baptist Church and nine years at First Baptist Florence, MS. Before retirement he served as Director of Missions for the Wayne County Baptist Association for nine years.

Born on December 5, 1940, he was the tenth child of Virgil and Gladys Smith, in a family that would grow to sixteen children. Together, they built not only a household, but a legacy of resilience, faith, and unwavering love.

Growing up in rural Greene County during the 1940s and 50s shaped Dwight into the man he would become. He often shared stories of those early years—of skinny-dipping in ponds, wrestling an alligator from Uncle Bill’s pond, and working tirelessly on the family farm. Among his many siblings, five brothers—Dwight, Wayburn, Kenny, Wallace, and Mitch—formed a bond that would last a lifetime. Together, they were teammates in every sense: in the cotton fields, on the football field, on the basketball court, and in life.

At a young age, Dwight made the most important decision of his life: he chose to follow Christ. That decision, simple yet profound, became the foundation of everything that followed. Years later, he would fully surrender to ministry, dedicating his life to sharing the Gospel and teaching others at home and abroad.

Dwight attended William Carey College, following his mother’s advice. There, a pivotal moment led him to change his academic path to English—an adjustment that would define his future. He became a devoted student of Scripture, a gifted teacher, and a lifelong learner. While he never sought recognition as a great preacher, those who knew him best often said, “He taught me the Bible.” While he continued to be a student and often used anthologies and a Greek bible to get to the root word, Dwight believed deeply that while life can be complex, God’s plan is simple and His love is accessible to all.

His greatest accomplishment was not measured in titles or achievements, but after attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he received a Doctorate of Ministry from Luther Rice Theological Seminary. He served twice on the Board of Trustees at William Carey for two terms, as well as, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Southeastern Baptist College. He also served on the State Board of Missions of the Florida Baptist Convention, 1975-1978; the Committee on Committees of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1987-1988, as well as serving as the President of the Mississippi Baptist Pastors Conference. He was the author of *Were You There*, and *The Story of His Glory*. He also ministered in Peru, India and Africa.

Dwight's passion was leading others to Christ, and he considered those he guided in faith to be the true jewels in his crown.

Officiating the service will be his brother, Rev. Mitchel Smith, and Rev. Charles Davis. Pallbearers will be: Aleksey Biriukov, B.L. Brooks, Danny Chancellor, Mike DeWitt, Art Simpson, and Tim Wise. Honorary Pallbearers: Larry Blakeney, Larry Brewer, Pat Butler, Hal Crocker, Henry Fountain, Eric Herrington, David Holston, Charles Mixon, Eddie Malone, Harlon Phillips, Harvey Phillips, Bobby Walters, Gary Walters, and Wayne Windham.

Florida Features



Huey L. Brock

Southside Church, DeLand, called **Huey L. Brock** as pastor, effective Sept. 20. A graduate of Baptist Bible Institute, Graceville, and Luther Rice Seminary, Jacksonville, he has held pastorates in churches in Florida, Georgia and Mississippi. He goes to DeLand from Johnson City, Tenn.



Dwight L. Smith

Dwight L. Smith, who has accepted the pastorate of Scott Lake Church, Lakeland, was installed by the church Oct. 11. Participating in the service were Stephen Cloud, interim pastor, and Joseph B. Folds Sr., director of missions, South Florida Association. Smith has served First Churches of Avon Park and Quincy.



Robert Ham

Robert Ham is the new minister of music and youth at Southside Church, Brandon. A graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Miss., and New Orleans Seminary, he goes from First Church, Luling, La.



Glenn Rogers

Glenn Rogers has been called as pastor of University Heights Church, Tallahassee. A graduate of Mid-America Seminary, Memphis, Tenn., he was formerly on staff at Bellevue Church, Memphis.

Carlton L. Butts, who has been serving as interim minister of music at Riverside Church, Tampa, was called for full-time service in that capacity.



Peter Vande Weghe

On Sept. 20, Northwood Church, West Palm Beach, welcomed **Peter S. Vande Weghe**, a student at Luther Rice Seminary, Jacksonville, as minister of education and evangelism.

E. Melton Deason will become pastor of East Hill Church, Pensacola on Oct. 18. A graduate of Samford University, Birmingham, Ala., and Southern Seminary, Louisville, Ky., he goes from Elkdale Church, Selma, Ala. Other pastorates in Alabama include First Churches of Lafayette and Gulf Shores, and Stansel Church in Reform.



E. Melton Deason



J. C. Galloway

Deltona Lakes Church, Deltona, has called **J. C. Galloway** as associate for outreach. He will develop the church's bus ministry.

Richard Phipps began as minister of music/youth at First Church, Monticello, on Oct. 4. A graduate of Stetson University, DeLand, and Southwestern Seminary, he has served churches in Live Oak and Brandon. He goes from First Church, Bogalusa, La., where he was minister of music for three years.

Frank Jacobs was called as interim pastor of South Miami Church, Miami.



Richard Phipps

Parrish Dies in Georgia

James W. Parrish, 68, a former Florida pastor, died Oct. 3 in Albany, Ga. A native of Jacksonville, he was pastor of Riverside Church, Miami, for 10½ years and also held pastorates at First Churches of Dade City and Plant City. He was pastor emeritus at First Church, Winter Park, where he served from 1963 to 1971.

Parrish was president of the Florida Baptist State Convention in 1953 and vice president of Stetson University, DeLand, 1960-64.

He received a bachelor of arts degree at Stetson University and a bachelor of theology and master of theology degrees at Southern Seminary, Louisville, Ky. He also had honorary doctor of divinity degrees from Stetson and Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss.

Funeral services were held at Sherwood Church, Albany, with Pastor W. A. Smith and Elbert Tyner, pastor, Northside Church, Dade City, officiating. Interment was Oct. 7 at Lake Park Cemetery, Laurel, Miss.

Survivors include his widow, Mrs. Lucile Blair Parrish of Albany; a daughter, Mrs. Tom McEachin of Taipei, Taiwan; two sons, Dr. John Parrish of Boston, Mass., and Gilbert Parrish of Atlanta; a sister, Mrs. James Merritt of Albany; a brother, Jennings Parrish of Albany; and eight grandchildren.

North East Park Church, St. Petersburg, called **Thomas Corbin** as minister of music and youth, effective Sept. 6. He is a graduate of Bob Jones University, Greenville, S.C., and the University of Florida, Gainesville. Before going to North East Park, he was minister of music and youth at Westwood Church, Live Oak.

Wescoat Holloway, pastor of First Church, Hawthorne, for 12 years, has resigned to become pastor of Calvary Church, Dalton, Ga. The Hawthorne church presented Holloway a love offering and a plaque on his last Sunday.

Eileen Rogers, a member of First Church, Oviedo, was appointed as a delegate to the Florida Conference on Children and Youth by Gov. Bob Graham. The conference will be in Orlando, Nov. 4-6.

On Sept. 13, First Church, Satellite Beach, honored **Pastor and Mrs. Robert G. Rowe** with a dinner and gifts on their 40th wedding anniversary. Rowe has been pastor of the church 14 years.

Oct. 15, 1981

Religion file double -

FBC, Quincy (Gadsden County)

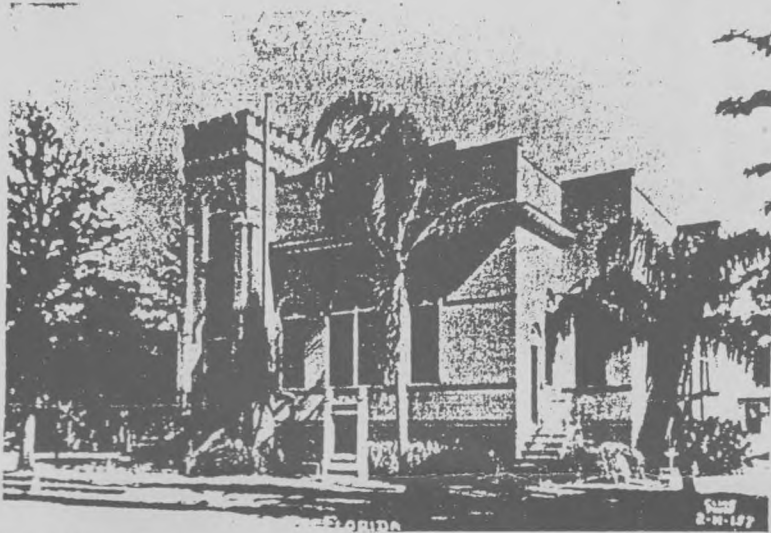
PASTORS

1893 - 1993

A. P. Ashurst	1893-1894
W. H. Strickland	1894-1895
A. M. Manning	1895-1898
M. M. Wamboldt	1898-1900
Stephen Crockett	1900-1901
W. A. McRae *	1901-1902
E. L. Wells	1902-1905
C. B. Wright	1905-1907
E. L. Wells	1907-1909
J. W. Boyd *	1909-1909
W. R. Lambert	1909-1913
W. A. Burns	1914-1923
R. T. Russell	1923-1924
S. T. Matthews	1925-1929
W. M. Vines	1929-1939
Matt Brittain *	1939-1939
B. C. Land	1939-1941
Warner E. Fusselle *	1941-1941
Henry A. Parker	1941-1944
Hugh A. Brimm	1944-1945
Nolan P. Kennedy	1945-1947
J. Ivey Edwards	1947-1955
Thomas E. Cuttino	1956-1971
James Southerland *	1971-1972
Dwight L. Smith	1972-1979
Jerry B. Garrard	1980-1985
Bill Jones *	1985-1985
Don M. Everson	1985-1991
Jerry Windsor *	1991-1992
Eric Holleyman	1992-1993

*Interim Pastors

... History



Construction began in 1915 and was completed in 1918

The First Baptist Church of Avon Park was organized in 1913. Charter members were Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hart, Miss Florrie Hart (Mrs. Donner Bass), Mr. and Mrs. George Godwin. Mr. and Mrs. Barney Blum, Mrs. H.E. Godwin. Mr. and Mrs. W.C. Skipper, Mrs. Lonnie Skipper, Miss Stella Skipper (Mrs. H.T. Piety), Mrs. Irvin Raulerson and Mrs. C.L. Gunter.

Services were first held in the school house on South Florida Avenue. The church moved from the schoolhouse into a rough board tabernacle during the year of 1914. The first church building was begun in 1915 on the corner of North Lake Avenue and Church Street. The first service was held in August 1918. The next auditorium was completed in 1950 and in 1961 a new educational

building was erected. Over the years the ministerial staff increased to include a Minister of Music, Minister of Youth, and a Minister of Education and Administration. Definite planning for a new sanctuary began in 1962 and the present sanctuary was completed in 1971. The dedication of this new building began a new era in the life of the church which continues today with long range planning for the enlargement of present property for a growing church committed to God's leadership.

The following pastors have served First Baptist Church of Avon Park:

Rev. Prentice	1913-1914	Rev. Loys Frink	1936-1938
Rev. White	1914-1915	Rev. J.P. Dalton	1938-1944
Rev. McDowell	1915-1916	Rev. O.E. Burton	1944-1945
Rev. Springfield	1916-1917	Rev. E.H. Puryear	1945-1949
Rev. J.A. Davis	1917-1920	Rev. Robert T. Liner	1949-1953
Rev. Barnes	1920-1922	Dr. C.H. Bolton	1953-1956
Rev. T.O. Baldwin	1922-1930	Rev. Aden D. Childress	1956-1979
Rev. W.K. McClure	1930-1936	Rev. Dwight Smith	1979-1981
		Dr. Jack R. Farmer	1982-1996



Construction completed in 1950