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Spencer, David W. was born in Senatobia, MS. He has served as pastor in North Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. Spencer served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Milton, for 20 years.

FBC Milton

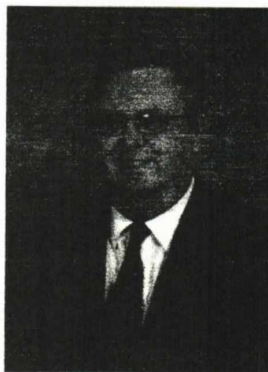
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Many special ministries and traditions were established during Rev. Bozeman's tenure, some of which continue: the Pastoral Care and Counseling Center, opening September 4, 1990; first annual Thanksgiving Feast, November 26, 1991; adoption of missions in Lincoln and Helmville, Montana, 1992; named and helped successfully led CALL - Citizens Against Legalized Liquor, 1992; established Northwest Florida Site, Florida Baptist Theological College, 1992, at FBC; established Intercessory Prayer Room and Ministry, 1993; established Partnerships with James Street Baptist Church and the Woodbine Baptist Church, 1993; established the Lewis Lecture Series, named for Earl Lewis, 1993, to host an annual theology series, which eventually brought speakers like Dr. Richard Land and Dr. Timothy George to FBC; held First Annual Chrism Tree Service, 1994; completed Doctor of Ministry, Project: "Developing Young Adult Leadership, FBC, Milton" and graduated with D. Min., at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, December, 1994; helped to lead and found the Pregnancy Resource Center, 1995; resigned to accept the pastorate of Central Baptist Church, Warner Robins, GA, May, 1995; last Sunday at FBC, was June 11, 1995.

Since leaving First Baptist Church, Dr. Bozeman has continued to serve as Pastor of Central Baptist Church, Warner Robins, GA, for the last 20 years. During that time, the church has relocated to a 155 acre site, where it has continued to grow and add ministries. He also currently serves as an Adjunct Professor for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Bozeman and his wife, Debbie have now been married 35 years. Both of their children are married and they have one granddaughter.

"My years at First Baptist Church were exciting, but a real challenge. I was young with much to learn. However, for most of my tenure, we had people join our church every Sunday. One of the privileges of my youth was to perform 30 wedding ceremonies! One of the greatest blessings was to make lifelong friendships, including Rev. Steve Wood, who served with me at FBC and also here in Warner Robins for a combined 16 years. Both of my children were saved and baptized at First Baptist Church, and continue to love the Lord's church. At FBC, we began a tradition of saying to each new church member; "We love you, we're praying for you and we are your friends." We still use a modified version of that in our Georgia church today." (Many thanks to Dr. Bozeman for providing this biographical information.)

David W. Spencer-1996-present



An Interview with the Pastor
By Carolyn Nichols

David Spencer has served as pastor of First Baptist Church in Milton since May, 1996. For 19 years, he has walked with church members in times of celebration and sorrow, and he has led the church in revamping its campus and recovering from destructive storms.

The congregation has come to know its pastor as a shepherd, scholar and storyteller.

Spencer was born in Sardis, Mississippi, in 1947, and was raised in Senatobia, Mississippi. His grandfather, Walter Spencer, and his father, Stanley Spencer, regaled the family with stories "in the Mississippi tradition," he said.

Young Spencer spent a sleepless night after hearing his grandfather tell of an encounter while riding home on a mule: "All of a sudden, the mule wouldn't go any further. I got down, but I couldn't get that mule to move," he said, his cadence quickening. "All of a sudden, a panther jumped out of a tree! You hear that panther, boy?"

David Spencer, a shy sixth grade student followed his family storytelling tradition in completing a class assignment in creative writing. He spun an intricate and exciting tale that amazed both his classmates and his teacher. By the time he was in high school, other students clamored to "hear David's story first" when such assignments were made. His high school English teacher, Josephine Wait, asked him about his future as he prepared to graduate. He told her, "I think I want to be a writer."

"I think it was the first time one of her students had ever told her that," Spencer said. "She probably didn't know I'd be writing sermons."

At that time, Spencer himself had other plans. He attended Northwest Mississippi Junior College and then University of Southern Mississippi as chemistry major with medical career aspirations. He enjoyed the discipline of science and mathematics which are "very planned, and progress from one step to the next," he said.

During the summer of his sophomore year in college, he attended a revival at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, two miles outside of Senatobia. Several members of the youth group of which he had been a member – about eight young adults – responded one by one to invitations during the meetings, saying they had been called to full-time Christian service. Spencer did not join his friends in a commitment.

"I went to Southern in Hattiesburg because I didn't know a soul there, and I did not want to be bothered by God's call," Spencer said.

Two uncles, Claude Howe, Sr. and Raymond Howe, were pastors, and had spiced up the family Thanksgiving gatherings with "war stories" from their pastorates. "I knew I did not want to be a pastor," Spencer said. "But my Uncle Claude would say, 'One day you will get over your foolishness and be a preacher.'"

After a "miserable year" of avoiding God's call, Spencer confessed his struggle to Claude Lazenby, pastor of his home church in Senatobia. The two spent most of Spencer's 21st birthday on their knees.

"We prayed until midnight and there was an overwhelming sense of the presence of God," Spencer said.

The young student returned to Hattiesburg, but transferred to William Carey College in the same city. He pursued Bible courses as passionately as he had a science curriculum.

"I had a new goal – to be the best student of the Bible," Spencer said.

In December 1969 he married Connie Russell of Hernando, Miss., and in 1970 they left for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. In November of 1970, Spencer was called as pastor of the Fishing Creek Baptist Church in Aventon, N. C. He was ordained in December back at his home church in Mississippi. He graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in 1973, and that summer he was called as pastor of the Camp Ground Baptist Church of Water Valley, Mississippi. (The reader will note that E. R. Vincett, pastor at Milton from 1930-1941, also once lived there.)

Three years later the Spencers moved to First Baptist Church of Sulligent, Alabama, along with their small son Brett. Spencer served at Sulligent for four years and during that time a second son, Jonathan, was born. He also enrolled in the doctoral program at New Orleans Seminary during his years at Sulligent and earned the degree of Doctor of Ministry in 1979.

Spencer's D.Min. project was titled "An Experiment in Innovative Preaching at First Baptist Church, Sulligent, Alabama." He alternated preaching sermons in different styles including narrative, expository and dialogue. He once planted a heckler in the congregation who argued and berated the sermon's points. At the end of the weeks-long experiment, Spencer surveyed the congregation to find what they remembered about the sermons.

"It was the stories they remembered," he said. "We have to remember that Jesus was a storyteller."

First Baptist Church of Long Beach, Mississippi, called the Spencers in 1980, and they served on the Mississippi Gulf Coast 16 years. During that time he served on the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, as attendance chairman for the first Foreign Mission Board Appointment Service ever held outside Richmond, Virginia, and as a trustee of his *alma mater* William Carey College. Later he was elected National Alumni President of that college. He also served as Adjunct Professor at the William Carey campus in Gulfport, Mississippi.

A pastor-search committee composed of Dr. Douglas Worley, George Norton, Alice Guidy, Bonnie Black, Ron Smith, Robert McClure, Clyde Gracey, Al Faulkner, and David Choma invited the Spencers to visit Milton in view of a call in March 1996. The church extended a call to Dr. Spencer to become pastor, and he began his work on Mother's Day, 1996.

Dr. Spencer set two priorities for his new ministry: excellence in areas including worship and facilities, and missionary involvement.

In the past 19 years, every building on the church campus has been renovated and a new sanctuary and administrative building have been constructed. His first emphasis was on providing clean, attractive space for preschoolers and children. To accomplish this, several old buildings were removed, parking improved, and equipment modernized.

The other priority was mission involvement. The church continues to give generously to the Cooperative Program, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, the Maguire Offering for State Missions, and the Mother's Day Offering for Florida Baptist Children's Homes.

Under Spencer's leadership, the church focused on mission trips to build churches, renovate church buildings, and conduct ministries far from home. John Guidy and Blackie Black, construction veterans, provide leadership in the building of churches. Middle and high schoolers participate in mission projects, and the Men's Ministry conducts "Mission Milton" annually to help local people with various needs.

After eight years at First Baptist Church, Spencer led the congregation in recovery after Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The September storm has been "the biggest challenge of our ministry here," Spencer said.

Thirty-six families in the congregation lost their homes, and almost every family's property suffered damage. Pastor Spencer, as shepherd of his flock, had to find the sheep that were scattered in the storm. His accounts of "driving out to houses and not being able to get down the road" were punctuated by long pauses and stares, as memories resurfaced of a wrenching time in the church's history.

"It's terrible to stand with a family looking at a homeplace that has been lost. When you've lost everything from keepsakes to clothes, you begin to understand that this world is not our home," he said.

Spencer's own home received about \$10,000 in damages, but the family was thrilled that the roof had withstood Ivan's winds. Hurricane Dennis – only a year later – took the roof off the house.

The church's new sanctuary steeple was leaning after Ivan, and the roof was leaking, but the church was able to become a hub for local and state Disaster Relief ministries. Church members and DR volunteers worked to mud-out homes and clear downed trees in the area, while volunteers fed hundreds of local residents and volunteers in the Family Life Center.

"This went on for weeks and every day you'd get up, put on your work clothes and gloves and mosquito spray and go to work. All this brought us together, but many of our families moved away after the storms," Spencer said. "It put uncertainty into their lives."

Apart from crises in church life, Spencer continues a long-term personal goal of preaching through every book of the Bible during his career. Sitting in his office amid hundreds of books, models of church buildings, diplomas, a library file of sermon illustrations and a copy of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible, the veteran pastor said he still relishes word studies in Greek and Hebrew – a regular practice as he prepares sermons.

"The study is good for me," he said.

In July 2015, Spencer has yet to preach through Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and some passages in Hebrews to complete his career goal, he said.

Along the way, Spencer has authored three books that showcased his storytelling abilities: *Strolling Through the Cemetery* (2011); *Stuff They Forgot to Mention at the Seminary* (2012); and *The Christmas Sermon* (2013). His most popular work, *Strolling Through the Cemetery*, contained anecdotes of funeral services that did not go as planned, and dozens of funeral sermons written during his career. His tributes to the deceased become treasured keepsakes for families.

"I listen to people's stories, and I write them down on 4x6 cards. If I hear someone say something in church that I really like, I write that down. I keep notes and I have a good memory," he said.

Although church members jokingly ask if he has "written my funeral sermon yet," Spencer said he never writes a funeral sermon while someone is still living. When the time comes, he said he reflects on his notes and then writes a sermon.

Although Spencer said the shepherding part of his ministry is "cultivated" and "not natural for a shy person," he attributes his empathy for people to his mother.

"I've been told that a pastor needs to spend the last 24 hours with the dying, and the next 24 hours with the living. That is the ministry of presence," he said.

Connie Spencer joins her husband in ministry. While serving in Florida, she worked for several years at the Santa Rosa Benevolent Association. She works as a preschool worker in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, a continuation of her work at First Baptist Church in Long Beach where she taught preschoolers 16 years.

In addition to his work with First Baptist Church in Milton, Spencer was elected to the State Board of Missions to represent Santa Rosa County and served from 2007-2013.

When asked what he foresees for First Baptist in 10 years, Spencer said he envisions a church with more old people as the national demographic ages, but also with more children as the birth rate increases. All this will require younger church leadership, different kinds of staff positions, and more advanced technology.

He said he hopes to see a continuation of the growth of the church's men's ministry, and growth in both men's and women's Bible studies on Wednesday evenings, "one of the biggest changes in our church life over the last several years."