

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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Stephens, James Fredrick (1917-2003) was born in Tampa, Florida, the son of James Edward and Nina Lee Drew Stephens. He graduated from Baptist Bible Institute, Graceville. Stephens served as pastor of Richland Baptist Church, Zephyrhills, 1955-1960, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Bascom, Eastside Baptist Church, LaBelle, and Concordia Baptist Church, Havana. He and his wife, Avis Sumner Stephens had three children.

James Frederick Stephens
Pastor, Richland Baptist Church, 1955-1960



James Frederick (J. Fred) Stephens, son of James Edward and Nina Lee (Drew) Stephens, was born October 4, 1917, in Tampa, Florida. On November 24, 1943, in Manatee County, Florida, he married Avis Sumner, born April 22, 1928, in Scott, Johnson County, Georgia, daughter of John Wesley and Arphelia (Beasley) Sumner. Rev. and Mrs. Stephens were parents of Carolyn, Larry and Linda. Rev. Stephens was ordained on August 15, 1954, while serving his first church, Hebron Baptist Church in Brooksville, Florida.

On August 28, 1955, Richland Baptist Church "elected Bro. Stephens to be our pastor."

Rev. Stephens rented the home on the northwest corner of Old Lakeland Highway and Stewart Street. His salary was \$200 per month, and in addition, the church voted to give him a monthly grocery shower. While at Richland, Rev. Stephens stressed the seriousness of a consecrated and separated life, the responsibility of tithing, and the importance of regular church attendance. He was evangelistic, and 118 new members came into the church. He was Vacation Bible School principal in 1956 and 1957, preached revivals, and arranged study courses. In 1957, ground was broken for an education wing behind the church, and in 1959, plans were begun for a baptistry.

Rev. Stephens, active in Pasco Baptist Association, preached the annual sermon in 1956, and was moderator in 1957 and 1958. He chaired several committees and was Training Union pastor advisor for the eastern side of the county from 1957 to 1959. He led congregational singing during annual meetings and also sang solos, including "How Great Thou Art" and "Face to Face." Mrs. Stephens served on the association's stewardship committee in 1956, was Intermediate Sunday School superintendent in 1957, and Girls Auxiliary director from 1958 to 1960. She also was Sunday School secretary at Richland, taught beginners in Training Union and was VBS principal in 1958 and 1959. In September 1960, Richland Baptist Church granted Rev. Stephens a letter of endorsement for application to Baptist Bible Institute (present-day The Baptist College of Florida) in Graceville. He resigned November 6, 1960.

Rev. Stephens also served Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Bascom, Jackson County; Eastside Baptist Church in LaBelle, Hendry County; and Concordia Baptist Church in Havana, Gadsden County, all in Florida. In addition, he pastored Hopewell Baptist Church in Moultrie, Georgia, and Baconton Baptist Church in Baconton, Georgia. He retired in 1989, and he and Mrs. Stephens returned to Concord in Gadsden County.

On March 6, 2003, Rev. J. Fred Stephens died in Tallahassee and was laid to rest in Concord Cemetery. Mrs. Stephens continues to live in Concord and is an active member of Concordia Baptist Church. She also is the prayer coordinator for Gadsden County Baptist Association, and is employed part-time as the receptionist at Faith Funeral Home in Havana.