

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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Stephenson, Richard M. (1921-1997) was the son of Edgar V. and Eleanor Daughtrey Stephenson. He graduated from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Stephenson served as pastor of churches in Kentucky, Virginia and Florida including First Baptist Church, Fort Myers. He and his wife, Noralee M. Mellor Stephenson (m. 1949) had three children. Stephenson served as the Executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Virginia.



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Those attending from **Fort Myers First Baptist** Church were the Rev. and Mrs. Richard M. Stephenson, Mesdames M. L. Hall, Frank Saley, Helen Caraway, F. C. DesRochers, John T. Pack, Baker Whisnant, William Mullarkey, C. E. Cooper, Esther Saulter, Ella Carson, P. W. Mauldin, J. S. Wahab, Z. Stevens, Verdie Gaskin, Ione Llewellyn, A. G. Colcord and Helen Jones Casey and Harry Fagan.

Those present from Riverside **Baptist** were Mesdames John Hart, Haywood Montgomery, L. H. Crow, E. D. Nolan, J. L. Whitaker, C. C. Cook, Leslie Corbitt, Jim Stevens, Lawrence Williams, Florence Langford and Allen McLeod.

2 **FORT MYERS (Fla.) NEWS**

First Baptist

Second and Jackson sts.

Rev. Richard Stephenson

Sunday school 9:45 a. m. Morning worship 11. Training union 1
6:45 p. m. Evening worship 8:00. d
Fellowship hour 8:30 p. m. Wed- T
nesday: Prayer 8:00 p. m.

Surprise Shower For Miss Mellor

Bride-Elect of Rev.
Richard Stephenson
Honored With Party

Miss Nora Lee Mellor, a bride-elect of the season, was the honor guest at a luncheon given Friday by Mrs. W. W. Watson at her home in Edison Park. The wedding of Miss Mellor and the Rev. Richard M. Stephenson will take place Feb. 1.

The rooms were decorated with pink sweetheart roses and snapdragons, the highlight of the arrangement being a miniature bride. Preceding the luncheon little Miss Nell Watson presented the honoree with a corsage. At the conclusion of the luncheon Miss Mellor was surprised with many lovely gifts.

The hostess was assisted in serving by her sister-in-law, Mrs. James Lewis Scott of Alexandria, Va., and Misses Betty Carol Boyd and Nell Watson.

Those attending were Mrs. Fred H. Mellor, William Mellor, Joe Richards, James Lewis Scott and the Misses Martha Kurtz, Louise Cochran, Jacqueline Allen, Barbara Hough, Rosemary Baker and Anne Wood.

Rev. R. Stephenson To Speak At First Baptist

The **Rev. Richard Stephenson** will be the guest minister Sunday at the First Baptist church, speaking at 10:45 a. m. on "God's Greatness" and at 7:30 p. m. on "Man's Salvation."

The **Rev. Mr. Stephenson** will graduate from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, in May. He has accepted the pastorate of the First Baptist church, Coral Gables, Fla.

> 2 of 12 matches

Evening star
Thu, Jun 08, 1950 · Page 4

president.

R. M. Stephenson Takes Falls Church Pastorate

The **Rev. Richard M. Stephenson** of the First Baptist Church, Fort Myers, Fla., has accepted a call to serve as pastor of the Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, Va.

A native of Southampton County, Va., Mr. **Stephenson** attended Hampden-Sydney College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

Anonymous	-----
Grace I. Downey	-----
Dr. Noah Pomeroy	-----
Anonymous	-----
James Callan	-----
Anonymous	-----
Employes William E. Miller Furniture Co.	-----
Mrs. Florence M. Essers	-----
H. A. H.	-----
P. D. H.	-----
Mrs. Rose S. Wells	-----
T. W. Stanton	-----
Anonymous	-----
Anonymous	-----
L. B. Brubaker	-----
Katherine Chapin	-----

Miss Noralee Mellor, of Fort Myers, became the bride of The **Rev. Richard M. Stephenson** Tuesday night.

MELLOR-STEPHENSON

FORT MYERS, Feb. 5.—(Special) Miss Noralee Mellor, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Fred H. Mellor, became the bride of The **Rev. Richard M. Stephenson**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar V. **Stephenson** of Ivor, Va., Tuesday night at First Presbyterian Church with The **Rev. Thomas Craigie Smart** officiating.

Mrs. **Stephenson** is a graduate of

Fort Myers High School and attended Stetson University in DeLand. Mr. **Stephenson** is a graduate of Hampden Sidney College in Hampden Sidney, Va., and of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He now is pastor of First Baptist Church.

Pre-nuptial music was rendered by
(Continued on Page 8—Column 4)

The Tampa Tribune
Sun, Feb 06, 1949 · Page 40

MELLOR-STEPHENSON

(Continued from Page 1)

Mrs. Arthur Grossman and Robert Foxworthy, vocalist.

Mr. Mellor gave his daughter in marriage. The bride was gowned in slipper satin, featuring a beaded sweetheart neckline. Tiny covered buttons accentuated the waist, which extended to a point in the back. The full skirt over padded hips, fell into a long train. Her floor length veil was attached to a coronet of pearl beads and she carried a cascade bouquet of white carnations.

Mrs. William H. Mellor, sister-in-law of the bride, wore a yellow satin model with sweetheart neckline, cap sleeves and long gloves. She carried a bouquet of yellow carnations and Fall leaves and wore a head coronet of matching material and flowers.

Maid-of-honor was Miss Alice Robinson of DeLand, in a bronze satin gown, similar to the matron-of-honor. She carried a bouquet of yellow carnations. Bridesmaids were Mrs. V. E. **Stephenson**, Jr., Ivor, Va., Miss Martha Kurtz and Miss Lucille Adams. Their gowns were of forest green satin, patterned after the matron-of-honor.

Edgar V. **Stephenson**, Jr., of Ivor, Va., brother of the bridegroom, was best man. Ushers were William H. Mellor, the bride's brother, Bill Price, Robert Foxworthy and Walter Draughon.

After a wedding trip through Florida, Mr. and Mrs. **Stephenson** will live at Cortez and Lynhart Ave. For traveling, the bride chose a suit of rose wool, with gray and rose accessories and a corsage of white carnations.

State Baptists Take Stephenson As President

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — Virginia Baptists, who elected the Rev. Richard M. Stephenson of Falls Church their new president, end their 140th annual convention today.

Stephenson, pastor of Columbia Baptist Church since 1950, was elected yesterday to succeed Charles H. Ryland, a Warsaw attorney, as president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Ministers and laymen alternate each year as president.

Others named by the 1,400 delegates were Dr. L. H. Rawls Jr., a layman of Suffolk, first vice president; Dr. Howard L. Arthur of Richmond's Leigh Street Baptist Church, second vice president; the Rev. Ralph J. Kirby, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Portsmouth, clerk; Dr. L. M. Polhill of Richmond, executive secretary; and Dr. Kenneth E. Burke of Richmond, treasurer.

Stephenson, 42, has served twice as president of the Falls Church Minister Council and as the 1960 president of the Virginia Baptist Pastors Council Conference. He was first vice president of the General Baptist Association in 1961.

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The Rev. Richard M. Stephenson will be speaker at the ladies night for the Brotherhood of First Baptist Church Thursday evening following a 6 p. m. dinner.

Mr. Stephenson, pastor of Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, graduated magna cum laude with a BA degree from Hampden - Sydney College and received his ThM from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He was listed in Who's Who in American Universities and Colleges, in Who's Who Among Protestant Clergy in America, received the Algernon Sidney Sullivan Medallion in 1943, and was a member of Omricon Delta Kappa honorary leadership fraternity.

The minister, who has also held pastorates in Richmond and Fort Myers, Fla., serves a church with 2,339 membership at the present time. He and Mrs. Stephenson have three children.

Mr. Stephenson was elected president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1963 and prior to that was a director for the Southern Baptist Foundation and president of Virginia Baptist Pastors conference.

Baptist Meet Will Feature Stephenson



Rev. Stephenson Will Be Honored

Rev. Richard M. Stephenson of Falls Church, Va., and a former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Myers, will receive an honorary degree June 6 from the University of Richmond, Va.

The well-known Baptist minister will receive the Doctor of Divinity degree. He was valedictorian of his graduating class at Ivor (Virginia) High School, graduated from Hampden-Sydney College and received his professional degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Rev. Stephenson has served as pastor of the Grove Avenue Baptist Church in Richmond, First Baptist here and has been pastor of Columbia Baptist in Falls Church since 1950.

Rev. Stephenson also has served as a member of the Florida Baptist Board of Missions and as a member of the Baptist General Board. He was president of the Virginia Baptist Pastors Conference and first vice president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

And **Rev. Richard M. Stephenson**, executive director of the Baptist General Association, gently reconfirms this focus as he describes each of denomination's ministries.

"I think our Baptist people, generally, have a very keen sense of ministry and their understanding of the church outreach," said **Stephenson**, who has been director for 15 years.

"They have a great sense that the church is really people. It's not

Changes

reading specialists. I have certification in English, not in reading. With reading, I punt. I just can't do it," Ms. Blanchard said.

Physical science would still be required for eighth graders but would be broken into two sections. One would emphasize theory. The other would emphasize practical applications for lower level students.

Under the proposed curriculum, students would have to pass a science course to go on to high school, and teacher Fran Martin said many students don't bother passing science now "because they know they don't have to."

Students must pass four courses now to move to the next grade. Two of those four courses must be English and math.

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on the ground level.

"So we see it in this context, we are managers. But the overarching thing in the consciousness of people, certainly most of our active members, is to minister to people," **Stephenson** said.

Stephenson's quiet and gentle manner belies a role that constantly puts him in touch with the denomination's 1,450 churches and 570,000 members of the general association. The boundaries basically follow the state's boundaries.

Southern Baptists wear the tag of being the largest Protestant denomination in the state and nation.

His work, like that of his counterparts in other denominations, puts him on the road about three days a week. **Stephenson** is there to share and give an ear to people at meetings, through his mail, at building dedications and all the church events that are part of the Baptist ministries.

He's hearing that people are still very loyal to their church. But tucked away behind that loyalty is their frustration at the economy and eagerness to grow spiritually.

Inflation and the bad economy have taken their toll on churches as well as personal wallets. But the Baptists are digging a bit deeper and sharing their money to keep the denomination's ministries in full gear, **Stephenson** said.

"Our people are loyal to the church. The fiscal year ended in November. Our offerings through the cooperative program, which is our main, basic channel of support, was slightly

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All People Special Love Of Baptists

By JILL VADEN
Staff Reporter

Jesus said: "For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me." Then the righteous will reply, "Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you?" And the king will answer, "I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me."

Matthew 25:35-40



R.M. Stephenson

the building that you go to. That's a facility to enable you to be trained, to have inspiration, to go out into the world.

"I think our Baptist people have a very strong sense of this — ministry is people's primary focus. I think most of them understand that you cannot have ministry without money."

Money is vital to many ministries and **Stephenson** believes most Baptists understand that they are stewards for God.

"God has entrusted each of us with a certain part of his material world. And we're simply to manage it for him. So the real question

The ministries of the Southern Baptists cover life — from church life for its members, to helping the handicapped, education for young people, helping the poor and all the etceteras of the Christian message.

The foundation for all that work and talk is a simple, but very deep belief that Baptists have a ministry to people and the local churches are the springboard.

Baptists Help Cover Poor

Continued From Page 9
over 7 percent in the year ending Nov. 30 over the previous year," he said.

"We would like for it to have been more. But given the economic situation, that's pretty good."

Social outreach that includes many ministries has long been a part of the Baptist community that stretches back early days in Virginia. The state's Baptist General Association was established in 1823.

The Baptists' strong sense of social outreach reaches to the local churches, he said. "As a denomination, for example, Virginia Baptists have responded well to the hunger situation, giving several hundred thousand dollars a year worldwide."

Around the Peninsula the Baptists' helping hand can be seen in ministries for the deaf and handicapped, its help with the seamen's center in Newport News and its outreach to the East End of Newport News through the Friendship House's services. Of course, there is always the outstretched hand to help poor people locally.

"Every local church is involved in social ministries. I think we're oriented toward ministry to people. And that is social ministry for people of all ages in need," Stephenson said.

"A great deal of the time of most of our pastors — local minis-

inistry to people, to share the good news of God's love and to minister to people all around."

There is no quota system for membership, but the denomination hopes to double its home and foreign mission force by the year 2000. And this is a task for everyone.

"We consider the minister the equipper. The minister's task is to train the members. Every Christian is a minister. Every Christian has a ministry to other people," Stephenson said.

The average Baptist considers his church very important, Stephenson said, adding, "I don't think in many instances that this is matched up with his commitment to the church, but I think he would tell you it's important."

"One of the main things we're looking at now is 70 to 75 percent of our own members really need to have a greater sense of commitment."

"We're trying to work with that group — people who say they are Baptist, but not in practice. This is where we are looking to a renewal within our own church," Stephenson said.

The 1950s were a time of great growth for the Protestant denominations and the 1960s and early 1970s were a time when society was testing its values and traditions, including the church according to Stephenson.

"A great deal of the time of most of our pastors — local ministers — is taken up in counseling members and non-members."

Ecumenism is a vital outreach for Baptists, but rather than focus primarily on national dialogues or groups, the contact is being done locally, Stephenson said.

"Our stance all along has been to encourage where you can the local churches to cooperate with the groups," Stephenson said from his office in the denomination's Richmond headquarters.

"In practice in local communities, you'll find neighbors and friends interchanging in their churches, exchanging pulpits and working together locally. They feel they are together."

"Baptists wouldn't know what you're talking about if you say you're not together on the issues, you're separated."

"I don't think they would know because they're the persons (of other denominations) who live across the street. They have interchange at weddings, services, Christmas and at different points," he said.

"If you're talking about the support of a great organization — in New York, Chicago, Switzerland — or wherever it is, organizationally Baptists have never been a part of that kind of people."

The Baptists' own programs, ministries and services often limit the time and commitment that clergy and others may give to ecumenical work, Stephenson said, renewing the emphasis that much is being done ecumenically on the local level.

The Southern Baptists are not officially aligned with the Virginia Council of Churches, but are involved with its programs wherever possible, Stephenson said, adding time and in-house commitments may limit the work.

tions, including the church according to Stephenson.

The Baptist church was hurt then by a decrease in Sunday schools and church-related activities, but it never lost membership.

Baptist church leaders have been greatly encouraged over the last two to three years, Stephenson said, with the upswing in church participation.

"My guess is that the '80s will be good, not only for Baptists, but for all Christian churches."

Stephenson foresees growth in all Baptist ministries, including the increasing number of young people who are studying for Christian vocations at the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

Stephenson is very optimistic about the future, adding that he has seen a great deal of renewal and commitment in the last two to three years. And society can be a bit better for the social ministries of the denomination.

"We have had an outreach concern for people long before helping people was all that much in the consciousness of people," Stephenson said, citing the programs of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

"Every Christian has one mission shown through different ministries. There's much to be done."

Stephenson is quick to compliment some of the work done by the preachers of the electronic church and equally as quick to be concerned that these people cannot be pastors to others.

"We believe the real strength of Christianity is in the local churches. No TV personality can be a pastor. You can be a spectator. The local church is indispensable," he said.

"We believe strongly in the local church, where a person can go to his pastor and talk over his problems, where you can minister

may limit the work.

Each and every Southern Baptist can step to the front when there's evangelistic work to be done because that ministry falls squarely on the shoulders of everyone.

"Baptists have always been evangelistic. In the last few years baptisms, which measure the end result of our evangelism, were down nationally. Last year we were up about 16 percent. This year, though the figures are not in, my guess is that we'll probably be down," Stephenson said.

There are many reasons for this, including the general population decline for the age group usually receiving baptism. Baptists do not have infant baptism, preferring to wait until the individual makes his own decision, say at ages 10 to 14.

"Evangelism and missions are the great things with us. By missions we mean ministries to people all over the world. We're a denomination that's largely held together for the purposes we interpret to carry out as the mission of Christ

problems, where you can minister to them, you can know them on a personal basis.

"We believe that the future of Christianity lies with the local church and this involvement."

Stephenson Resume

- **NAME:** Rev. Richard M. Stephenson
- **TITLE:** Executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia since 1968.
- **EDUCATION:** Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., master in theology, and the University of Richmond, doctor of divinity.
- **PASTORATES:** Fort Myers, Fla., and Falls Church, Va.
- **SPECIAL MINISTRIES:** He was a trustee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968-1977, and was president of the Association of Baptist State Executive Directors, 1980.

Richard Murrell Stephenson

Birth

1 Dec 1921

Death

17 Apr 1997 (aged 75)

Burial

National Memorial Park

Idylwood, Fairfax County, Virginia, USA

Husband of Noralee Mellor.

Family Members

Parents

Edgar Vick Stephenson

1885–1959

Eleanor Daughtrey Stephenson

1895–1986

Spouse

Noralee M Mellor Stephenson

1928–2019 (m. 1949)

Surviving are her daughters, Vivian Stephenson Clingenpeel (Mike) and Roberta Lee Stephenson;

and son, Richard Murrell Stephenson, Jr.;