

Church celebrating anniversary, losing a pastor

By Nancy Flake
Courier staff

The last day of April will be one filled with joy and tinged with sorrow for the 750 members of First Baptist Church in Grangerland.

Not only is April 30 the 50th anniversary date of the church, but also the 30th anniversary of its pastor, Rev. Charles Fannin - who is retiring that very day.

The unusual historic aspects of the date are just another chapter in the life of a church that began in an unusual way.

"The church was founded by a traveling insurance salesman named Lewis Fulmer," said Fannin. "He was selling door-to-door and found out the need of a Baptist church in the community."

Fulmer, a member of Park Memorial Baptist Church in Houston, asked his church to organize First Baptist Church as a mission project. "They started meeting in homes, then moved to the community center," noted Fannin.

The thick pine forest in the area proved to be one of the church's greatest assets when some of the 185 charter members and volunteers cut logs and sawed the timber for a new building.

"One man had a sawmill and Mr. D.D. Granger had the land," said Dorothy Lee, who, along with her husband Cloyce, is a charter member. "It took several months, because the lumber had to dry and cure. Those men would build and the women

would fix dinners."

Lee also remembered that baptisms in those early days were held in an oil well slush pit.

So many good memories are crowded in Lee's mind that she couldn't focus on one single incident. "The first beginning was the best," she remembered. "We prayed about everything and cried when each minister left."

The emotions will be especially high for Fannin's leaving, she said. "He's the greatest. I've enjoyed him every minute - we took them in and just loved them."

"He's always there when you need him - he's such a servant of his people."

Fannin and his wife Carolyn, a retired teacher who spent 18 years teaching math at Conroe High School, will move to the San Antonio area, in a house right across the road from their older daughter and her family.

"I'll take about a month or so off," said Fannin. "They'll have to be an adjustment, a grieving period from leaving the church."

In addition to his plans for fishing and "playing with my granddaughters," the tall, soft-spoken minister will keep tending flocks as an interim ministers for churches without pastors.

"I've pastored every year except one since January, 1958, and I've pastored seven churches," he said. "I've done hundreds of weddings and have probably averaged 250 funerals in 30 years, and they don't get any easier."



He feels his greatest legacy as a minister is "seeing those who've started a relationship with Jesus Christ continue that relationship, and seeing the church continue to be a vital influence in the community." Fannin is also proud of the fact that the church moved into its new building in 1981 almost debt-free, thanks to the commitment of church members.

"The greatest reward is seeing people's lives changed," he noted. One dramatic instance Fannin talked about was the case of Danny Wendt, now pastor of nearby Allendale Baptist Church. "He was an undercover vice cop in Houston and had a dance band. The Lord changed his

life and called him to preach. "He just graduated from Southwestern Seminary in Dallas."

The church is holding a day-long celebration April 30, titled "What a Difference You've Made in My Life." Fannin doesn't yet know what topic his last sermon there will cover, but knows that "it will be a message of encouragement."

"We're going to try to keep it from being too emotional," he said.

The church's simultaneous celebration of its anniversary and the honoring of Fannin will begin April 30 at 9:30 a.m. and continue through 3:30 p.m., including a lunch at the church. For more information, call (936) 231-2624 or (936) 231-2372.

GRANGERLAND BAPTIST CHURCH

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