

100-year-old preacher finally slated to receive seminary master's degree_120604

December 3, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

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FORT WORTH-Eugene Florence, 100, will receive a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth during the seminary's commencement ceremony at Travis Avenue Baptist Church Dec. 10.

Eugene Florence

Florence—who was featured in the Baptist Standard earlier this year—was 39 years old when he enrolled at the seminary in 1943 when only night classes were offered to black students. He took classes two nights a week for eight years before receiving a diploma in theology.

Southwestern Seminary began offering courses to black students at “Negro extension centers” in Beaumont, Austin, Waco and Mexia in 1940. But not until 1950 did seminary trustees pass a policy that allowed black students to be admitted to graduate level theological education.

By 1958, all six Southern Baptist seminaries admitted students regardless

of race.

Seminary President Paige Patterson said the degree was the seminary's way of honoring a remarkable man as well as recognizing the institution's error in the past.

“He earned this degree according to the best information we could get,” Patterson said.

“But it was not given because at that time Southwestern Seminary didn't allow black students to come and get a master's degree. Our posture toward black students was wrong in those days.”

Southwestern Seminary also will award degrees to 295 students from 28 states and 10 foreign countries during the commencement ceremony.

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