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By Greg Warner

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP)—Less than a week after bidding farewell to retiring pastor Jerry Vines, First Baptist Church of Jacksonville—one of the country's largest congregations—is expected to nominate Dallas pastor Mac Brunson as his successor.

The Jacksonville church posted a simple announcement on its website Feb. 9: "Please join us this Sunday, Feb. 12, for an announcement from the pulpit committee." Several well-placed Baptists in Jacksonville said Brunson will be announced as the candidate.

"That's what I've been told," state Sen. Stephen Wise, a prominent member of the church, told Associated Baptist Press Feb. 9. "It's pretty well known. I was told in an e-mail this morning."

Brunson already fills one of Christianity's most legendary pulpits—First Baptist Church of Dallas—where W.A. Criswell and George W. Truett rose

to fame. But the Dallas church has lost some of its luster—and membership—in recent years. With about 10,000 total members, it is about a third the size of the Jacksonville church, which counts 28,000 members and occupies nine blocks of downtown.

Brunson has long been mentioned as a candidate for the Jacksonville pastorate. He asked the Dallas congregation Jan. 8 to pray for him concerning a major decision about his future. He declined to tell reporters any details at the time.

Brunson was one of the featured speakers at the Jacksonville church's pastors' school in early February. He could not be reached by phone or e-mail Feb. 9. No one was answering the phones at First Baptist of Jacksonville that evening either.

Brunson has been senior pastor of the Dallas congregation since 1999. He also serves as chancellor of Criswell College, the undergraduate school founded by members of the church.

Previously Brunson was pastor of Greenstreet Baptist Church in High Point, N.C. He holds degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Furman University in Greenville, S.C. He and his wife, Debbie, have three children.

First Baptist has been a fixture in downtown Dallas since 1868. Its facilities now occupy six city blocks. It has an average Sunday school attendance of 3,103 and total annual receipts of \$26 million.

Vines, 68, pastor of the Jacksonville church for 23 years, announced his retirement last May. It became official Feb. 7. Like Criswell, he was president of the Southern Baptist Convention and a pivotal figure in the conservative takeover of the SBC. He also was a trustee chairman at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

Paige Patterson, one of the architects of the SBC conservative movement, told the *Florida Times-Union* of Jacksonville: "I wouldn't hesitate to say that Dr. Vines and (late Memphis pastor) Dr. Adrian Rogers were the two most important figures in the conservative movement."