

Around the State: Former Texas Rangers at Richardson church

April 5, 2017



John Wills (center), executive pastor at The Heights Church in Richardson, hosted former Texas Rangers Scott Sheldon (left) and David Murphy. Former Texas Rangers outfielder **David Murphy** and utility infielder **Scott Sheldon** spoke in worship services at The Heights Church in Richardson recently, presenting their Christian testimonies. They also made appearances in the Spanish-language, children's ministry and student ministry worship gatherings. After church, they greeted fans, signed autographs and posed for photos. In 2003, the Boston Red Sox drafted Murphy, a Houston native who played baseball for Baylor University. He was traded to the Rangers in 2007, where he played seven seasons. Sheldon played with the Rangers from 1998 to 2001 after one season with the Oakland A's, and he later played in Japan. On Sept. 6, 2000, Sheldon became only the third player in Major League Baseball history to play all nine positions in a single game. **John Wills**, executive pastor at The Heights Church and former chaplain for the Houston Astros, was host for the special events.

Three schools affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas—Dallas Baptist University, Hardin-Simmons University and the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor—have been named among the top

colleges in the nation by [Colleges of Distinction](#). To receive the designation, schools must demonstrate results in four areas—engaged students, great teaching, vibrant community and successful outcomes. High school counselors and educators make nominations, and each school is evaluated on key indicators, including student engagement, student empowerment and curricular innovation. The annual process to select the nation’s Colleges of Distinction also includes a review of each institution’s freshman experience, as well as its general education program, strategic plan, and alumni success and satisfaction measures.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas named two members to the Connections Team of its Executive Board staff. **Tim Marrow**, former pastor of First Baptist Church in Plainview, is area representative for Central Texas. Marrow, pastor of First Baptist Church in West Albuquerque, N.M., 21 years, will provide training, support and resources for churches in an area that includes Brownwood, Brenham, Waco, Temple and Austin. Marrow, a graduate of Howard Payne University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, also will consult with churches when they are without a pastor or during periods of plateau or decline. **Anthony Cobbs**, former executive pastor at Higher Dimension Church in Houston, is a church starter for Southeast Texas. Cobbs will work with new churches in an area that includes Houston, Galveston, Bryan/College Station, Beaumont, Orange and Port Arthur. He also will work alongside associations and churches in the area to start congregations. Cobbs, a Nebraska native with degrees from Wayland Baptist University and Creighton University, has served as a youth pastor, small-group pastor and senior pastor. He lived in San Antonio 13 years, which included two years as a church planter in the area. He also has worked as a consultant with Texas Baptists’ African-American Ministries.

Baylor University adopted new policies that provide paid parental leave for staff and an adoption assistance program that benefits both staff and

faculty at the university, effective April 1. Baylor's parental leave policy provides up to four weeks of paid leave for full-time staff—female and male—who become parents through birth or adoption. The adoption assistance program for full-time Baylor faculty and staff will help defray expenses associated with the adoption process. The program will reimburse up to \$6,000 of qualifying adoption-related expenses per adoption, up to two children per year. Baylor joins SMU as the only Texas universities that provide both staff and faculty with paid parental leave. Baylor is the only university in Texas and one of the few nationally that provides adoption assistance as an employee benefit.



John Vassar The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor named **John S. Vassar** as the school's new provost and senior vice president for academic affairs after a nationwide search. Vassar, current provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at Louisiana State University in Shreveport, will begin at UMHB June 1. Vassar earned his undergraduate degree from LSU Shreveport, his master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. in religious studies from Baylor University. In addition to his academic work, Vassar has served churches in both Texas and Louisiana as an intentional interim minister, having undergone training through the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He and his wife, Karen, have three children—Hannah, 21; Bethany, 18; and Paul, 14.



Lori Spies **Lori A. Spies**, assistant professor and missions coordinator for Baylor University's Louise Herrington School of Nursing, was selected for a 2017-18 Fulbright Global Scholar Award by the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. The award will enable Spies, a family nurse practitioner, to collaborate with healthcare providers in India, Vietnam and Zambia to research best education practices in regard to noncommunicable diseases. Assistant Professor **Shelby Garner** was selected for a 2016-17 Fulbright U.S. Scholar grant award to India. The Fulbright Program, the U.S. government's flagship international educational exchange program, is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Since 1946, the program has provided more than 370,000 participants from more than 180 countries with the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research, exchange ideas and contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns.



Miss ETBU Taylor Rowlands Taylor Rowlands, a junior elementary education major at East Texas Baptist University, was crowned Miss ETBU 2017. She received a \$1,000 scholarship and will serve as an official ETBU ambassador at special events and Marshall community activities. Rowlands, the daughter of **Jerry and Julie Rowlands** of Houston, is a member of the Tiger Cheer Squad who volunteers at Trinity Episcopal School, Marshall Manor nursing home and Kids' Club through Baptist Student Ministry. **Harleigh Parrish**, a junior from Huntington, was selected first runner-up, and **Mallory Kauffman**, a junior from Sugar Land, was named second runner-up and Miss Congeniality.

Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary has launched an updated two-year online certificate program for bivocational ministers and others with busy schedules and tight budgets who want to prepare for ministry and enrich their faith. Truett Seminary also offers a 16-month certificate of Christian foundation program for laity. Truett Seminary also has formed a new partnership with Texas Baptists' Urban Church Leaders Certification that allows students to pursue a certificate of ministry with four urban ministry course options. All courses in the certificate programs have continuous open enrollment and may be started at any time. Assignments are accessible with only modest amounts of writing required, and most

certificate students spend about one to three hours weekly on their studies. The courses are not for academic credit, so there are no grades or due dates for assignments. For more information, call (254) 710-6351, email david_tate@baylor.edu or click [here](#).

Anniversaries

Harvey Abke, fifth, as pastor at Burleson County Cowboy Church in Caldwell

Tommy Roberson, fifth, as pastor at Little River Baptist Church in Cameron

Ordained

J. Carlos Garduño Ramirez to the gospel ministry March 26 at Tilden Baptist Church in Tilden, where he is associate pastor.