

After 59 years, Garland Bible teacher has no plans to stop

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GARLAND—Sylvia Vaughan began teaching a first-grade Sunday school class at [First Baptist Church in Garland](#) in 1952, and she's never looked back.

"I've never thought of stopping. I never get frustrated with it. Even on the bad days, it's a good day to see the children learning about Jesus," she said.

Sylvia Vaughan teaches a lesson to first graders in Vacation Bible School at First Baptist Church in Garland. She has taught the first-grade Sunday school class 59 years, and for most of those years, she also has taught the same age group in VBS.

For 59 years, she has taught first graders almost every Sunday morning, and nearly every summer, she also has taught them in Vacation Bible School.

At 82, the only concession she makes to age is sitting in a chair behind a small table when she teaches children a Bible story, rather than joining them in a circle on the classroom floor.

"If I were to get on the floor, they would have to call 911 to pull me up," she said.

Vaughn credits an academic adviser at Baylor University with a fateful decision that shaped her life.

“After I graduated from high school, I wanted to take art at Baylor,” not work with children, she recalled.

But the adviser, believing a young woman at that time needed a teaching certificate, enrolled her in an education class where Vaughan found her life’s calling—and her future husband, Kenneth.

“I grew up Episcopal, and my husband has always been Baptist,” she recalled. After they married and moved to Garland, they attended First Baptist Church about two years before she decided to be baptized. Immediately after her baptism, she accepted an invitation to begin teaching children’s Sunday school.

“I never sat in an adult class, and I don’t think I could,” she said. “I am happiest when I’m with the children.”

While she enjoyed her 28 years as a third-grade teacher in the Garland public schools, Vaughan said, that experience does not compare with the joy she finds teaching first graders in Sunday school and Vacation Bible School.

“To see them grow in their love for Jesus is just wonderful. It’s thrilling,” she said.

First-time visitors to Vaughan’s classroom immediately notice its elaborate, three-dimensional decorations.

“I can remember the little classrooms with the gray walls, with just an 8×10 picture of Jesus and a little map of Israel hanging there. It was so depressing,” she said. “I like color.”

She credits her daughter, Cynthia Spenser, with providing much of the labor and creativity that makes the room such a showplace. Each year, the two of them—together with her granddaughter, Ashley—spend long hours

thinking about how to illustrate the next Vacation Bible School theme and months preparing the decorations.

She continues to use them throughout the year in Sunday school, adapting them as needed.

“I just love Vacation Bible School. I always look forward to it,” she said. “But you really are able to become more familiar with the children you have year around. Sunday school is my love and joy.”

Amy Owens, minister to children at First Baptist Church in Garland, notes Vaughan’s dedication to all the children who enter her classroom but particularly singles out the loving patience she demonstrates with special-needs children.

“She has a way with them,” Owens said. “Mrs. Vaughan loves any child, and she will go out of her way to make sure there is a place for any of them in her class.”

After 59 years, Vaughn has taught children representing the second and third generations of some of her earliest pupils.

“We have parents who say, ‘I had Mrs. Vaughan, and now I want my children to have Mrs. Vaughan,’” Owens noted.

Carol Hataway, one of Vaughan’s former students, thought about her former teacher when her own son, who has autism, turned 6 years old and needed to work on socialization skills. Vaughan welcomed him into her Sunday school class.

“I asked if I could stay in class with him, and she said, ‘Of course, you can,’” Hataway recalled. Before long, she began to help in the Sunday school class. In time, she assumed increasing responsibilities. Ten years later, Vaughan calls Hataway “my right hand.”

“She is a unique individual,” Hataway said, describing Vaughan. “The things that set her apart are her love for those kids and her love for God. ... Her commitment is just incredible.

“I have learned so much from her. It’s such a blessing to serve with her. I hope she will be here another 15 or 20 years.”