

Belton Baptists honor Church of Christ pastor

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BELTON—A Baptist church making its sanctuary available for the funeral of a longtime Church of Christ pastor and paying tribute to him may seem unusual in some towns, but not in Belton.

“Our congregations have a tremendous love and deep respect for each other,” said Andy Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Belton.

When Joe Baisden, pastor of the Church of Christ in Belton 33 years before his retirement in 2004, died in mid-August, his home church was undergoing building renovations. It seemed natural for First Baptist to provide its facility for his memorial service, Davis said.

The musical instruments in the sanctuary at First Baptist remained silent as Baisden’s son, Donnie Baisden, led a cappella renditions of hymns familiar both to the Baptist and Church of Christ members in attendance.

Davis remembered an occasion years earlier when First Baptist’s facility was unavailable for a funeral, and the Church of Christ offered its facility.

“If we can ever return the favor, let us know,” Davis recalled telling Baisden at the end of the funeral. “Who knew it would be his own service? I believe Joe Baisden would have gotten a real kick out of that.”

First Baptist Church and its leaders had “a longtime close relationship with Joe Baisden,” Davis explained. “I inherited it, and I am so delighted that I did.”

The friendship began during the long tenure of Leroy Kemp as pastor at First Baptist, and it continued when Davis arrived about 28 years ago.

“We loved Joe Baisden,” Davis said. “He was always so upbeat and so positive. He had a way of warming your heart, any time you were around him.”

Largely as a result of Baisden’s influence, Belton’s Church of Christ and First Baptist cooperated in community ministries and even worshipped together occasionally.

Baisden, who served many years as a trustee of the Church of Christ-affiliated Abilene Christian University, also supported the Texas Baptist-affiliated University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton. Several years ago, UMHB named him an honorary alumnus.

“He defined what it was like for a pastor to be involved in the life of his community,” Davis said. “In a real sense, he was Belton’s pastor. But he never compromised his leadership of his own church. He set quite a pace for me to try to follow.”