

Harold Branch, African-American Texas Baptist pioneer, dies at age 92

January 23, 2012

CORPUS CHRISTI—Harold Branch, the first African-American officer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas died Jan. 20 in Corpus Christi—a community he served in various capacities since 1956. He was 92.

Branch was pastor of [St. John Baptist Church](#) in Corpus Christi from 1956 until his retirement in 1988.

Harold  Branch A native of Conroe, he earned a bachelor's degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C., in 1943. He served as a pastor in Massachusetts while working on a master's degree at Andover-Newton Seminary before returning to Texas in 1947.

In 1954, Branch led 19th Street Baptist Church in Austin to be one of the first two predominantly African-American congregations affiliated with the BGCT. Nineteen years later, he was elected second vice president of the BGCT.

He served nine years as a trustee of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and served the BGCT Christian Life Commission, Executive Board and State Missions Commission. eHe received the CLC Distinguished Service Award in 1988 and the Texas Baptist Elder Statesman award in 1993.

After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, local officials credited Branch with keeping the peace by providing a calming voice in

troubled Corpus Christi neighborhoods.

Two years later, when a fight broke out between two black men at a local football stadium, police officers were accused of using excessive force in breaking up the fight. When about 50 black spectators marched to the police station protesting what they termed “police brutality,” Branch helped settle down the crowd and ensure that who witnessed the incident were heard.

In 1971, he became the first African-American elected to the Corpus Christi City Council since 1889. He also served on the local Housing Authority and Human Relations Commission, and he served a term as president of the South Texas Council of Governments.

In recognition of Branch’s commitment to improving education for young people of all races, the Corpus Christi Independent School District agreed to name a career and technical high school—scheduled to open in fall 2013—after him.