

IN FOCUS: The heart of Texas Baptists

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What is at the heart of Texas' Baptists? What makes us unique? What makes us strong?

We typically think of our size, our institutions or even our leaders when we attempt to answer these questions. However, last Saturday I began to realize there is another answer: Juanice DuBose.

You may not know Juanice unless you live in Gonzales. I met her more than 30 years ago, when she showed up as a member of a pulpit committee from First Baptist Church. Sheila and I recently visited her in a nursing home in Gonzales, where she is bravely fighting a terminal illness.

Juanice has spent her whole life as a Texas Baptist, active in First Baptist Gonzales for most of that time. Her mother was the librarian of the church, and she was the reason the church had one of the finest libraries in the county. Mrs. Davis read all the books and marked through any word or expression that didn't belong in a church library.

Juanice always has been bright. When she asked her mom the meaning of a word, her mother would make her look it up. That created a lifelong interest in vocabulary and reading. It also prepared her for a vocation as a public school teacher. Her thirst for knowledge was evident in her Christian pilgrimage. She was a student of the Bible, constantly learning and teaching. Juanice was one of those church members who made a pastor desire to study and preach.

Juanice is a Texan in the true sense of the word. She is strong,

independent, proud and opinionated, yet she also is sensitive, encouraging and loving. She is no stranger to adversity. She has struggled with cancer before, experienced the grief of the loss of parents and spouse, and has faced the usual challenges and joys of being a mother and a grandmother. When I asked her how I could pray for her, her desires were not for herself but for her family.

Juanice, and thousands like her, make Texas Baptists great. She has been a faithful part of her church more than 80 years. Pastors have come and gone. The county has had its ups and downs. The church, and the BGCT, have fussed and healed. Ecclesiastical trends have burst onto the scene and then fizzled. But Juanice and many from her generation have stood strong.

They have been unwavering on the lordship of Christ, the authority of the Bible, the autonomy of the local church and the mission of the church. They have been faithful in their attendance, giving and leadership. They have lived a life devoted to prayer and service.

Juanice and the committee from First Baptist took a big risk on recommending me, as a 25-year-old, as their pastor. They had plenty of times to doubt their decision. Yet they loved me and my family, prayed for us, counseled us, encouraged us and became our family.

We have wonderful institutions and churches, colorful and able leaders, but Juanice and those like her are the heart of Texas Baptists.

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