

William M. Pinson Jr.: All in Christ are gifted for ministry

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From 1983 to 2000, William M. Pinson Jr. served as the executive director of the [Baptist General Convention](#) of Texas. Prior to that, he was president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (now [Gateway Seminary](#)), pastor of [First Baptist Church Wichita Falls](#) and an ethics professor at [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#).

From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Ft. Worth, but my first two years were in Dallas and then in Lancaster, Texas. My father came from a farming family and believed that I needed that kind of experience.

However, he was a businessman when I was born and no longer a farmer. So, we moved to Lancaster, which was then a small community a few miles south of Dallas, and we lived in town but with enough room for me to have chickens, ducks, guineas, sheep, horses, a garden and an orchard to take care of. It wasn't a farm, but it offered some ag-type experiences.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

My mother came from a strong Methodist family and my father from a long

line of Baptists. We attended both Methodist and Baptist churches. However, when I reached school age, we attended only the Baptist church in Lancaster, where my father was a member.

In a terrific Sunday school class taught by a college student, Coleman Craig, we memorized Scripture related to salvation, heard the plan of salvation presented regularly and were witnessed to personally by the teacher and others.

I came to realize that I was a sinner and repented, believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior and was baptized.

My mother, feeling that the family ought to be in the same church and accepting Baptist beliefs, was baptized at the same time that I was. Believer's baptism by immersion was a Baptist doctrine firmly held to by our church.

Why did you feel called into ministry?

God used a variety of ways to issue that call.

I grew up hearing stories about my Baptist ancestors who were very active Baptists, such as my great-grandfather J. F. Pinson, a preacher who helped start Baptist churches in the Dallas area in the 1800s and was a friend of R. C. Buckner.

In college, my studies led me to consider such questions as: Why am I here, and what is my purpose in life? I attended some of the early Billy Graham meetings and felt a tug toward evangelism and preaching.

The summer of my sophomore year I devoted to seeking God's will in a very special way through prayer, Bible study and reading books by Christian authors. A growing conviction that God was leading me to spend my life in church-related service caused me one night to go out into our backyard,

kneel and commit my life to that.

I did not know what all that involved, but I was committed to finding and following God's leadership. I visited with my pastor, Waller Bartles, who helped me understand something of what this commitment meant, and then I made the decision public in a church service. My church, Lancaster First Baptist Church, was very supportive.

In addition to your most noted position, where else did you serve in ministry?

In college, I served with the BGCT Student Department's Youth Evangelism Ministry, directed by W. F. Howard, preaching revivals throughout Texas; my college pastor, L. B. Reavis, also asked me to be a sort of unofficial intern, and I learned a great deal from him.

As a seminary student, I continued to preach revivals, pastored a wonderful country church and served as associate director of the [BGCT Christian Life Commission](#).

After graduation from Southwestern Seminary, I became a professor at the seminary, then pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, then president of Golden Gate Seminary (now Gateway Seminary) in California, and then executive director of the BGCT.

In each instance, my predecessor, such as James Landes, was a tremendous person, someone with whom I could discuss challenges and plans. Realizing how much we owe to those of the past, I always wanted to learn from those who had gone before.

When did you leave your most-noted position and/or retire from full-time ministry?

After more than seventeen years as executive director, the longest tenure

of anyone in that office, I felt God leading me to cease my service in that role. Although I was urged to stay in office, I retired in February of 2000 believing that this was God's will for me.

My personal conviction is that I should not retire from full-time ministry as long as I am able to function, and thus I viewed this as a transition to another phase of ministry.

How have you occupied yourself since then?

The BGCT voted for me to become executive director emeritus and, as part of the responsibilities of the emeritus position, to serve as volunteer director of the Baptist Heritage Center.

I have preached, taught in college and seminary, delivered lectureships, helped develop material on Baptist identity, such as the *Baptist Identity Series*, participated in various committees and boards, authored books and articles and served as a trustee of the Baylor Health Care System.

Happily, I have enjoyed time with my family and friends.

Where do you live now, and where do you go to church?

My wife and I live in Duncanville, Texas, where we have lived since moving from California to Texas in 1982 to become executive director. We are currently members of the First Baptist Church of Lancaster, where we were baptized as youth, grew up and were married.

Ministry/Life

What was your favorite or most joyful aspect of

ministry? Why?

My favorite and most joyful aspect has been to see persons saved from living death to abundant life through faith in Christ and the positive impact this has on families and society in general.

Sometimes this is through an individual witness and sometimes through cooperative effort. An example of the latter was MissionTexas and Texas2000. These were major cooperative efforts by Baptists in Texas related to the BGCT to bring the growing Texas mission field to Christ and to expand the Texas mission base for a lost world.

These efforts resulted from prayerful cooperation by all parts of the Baptist family, including individuals, churches large and small, associations, universities, medical centers, child care institutions, Woman's Missionary Union, Texas Baptist Men, the *Baptist Standard*, the Baptist Foundation (now HighGround Advisors), and the various ministry departments of the BGCT.

Men and women, young and old, of various ethnic groups representing these entities, gathered in large planning teams to pray, study and recommend strategy and action. The result was record after record in practically every aspect of Baptist life, such as baptisms, church membership and missions offerings.

And the records were not mere statistics; they represented lives being changed by the power of the gospel. No one person or group could claim credit; these were cooperative efforts, and God chose to bless them even during tumultuous denominational discord.

What part of ministry delivered the greatest heartache or headache?

The greatest heartaches have come when persons who were in leadership

positions as Christians failed to live up to their potential, or became unfaithful to Christ's calling, or proved to be selfish or immoral. I have not been surprised because any of us is capable of great sin, but I have been disappointed.

What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry?

I wish all persons who are in Christ would realize that they are gifted as part of the body of Christ for ministry. Indeed, some are called by God to particular service and leadership, but everyone is to be in the "work of the ministry" (Ephesians 4:12).

About William

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

They are too numerous to name them all individually. I have been blessed beyond measure by the persons God has brought into my life to nurture, guide, admonish and inspire me. This has been true from my youth until today.

In some ways, those persons who mentored me early in my ministry have been especially influential, sort of setting the course for future years. For example, as president of the BSU (now BSM) in college, I worked closely with Doyle Baird, BSU director, where I learned more about organization and teamwork than in any professional seminars on the subject I have had.

I was also serving as student body president and worked closely with the school president, a dedicated Methodist, and gained understanding of the importance of careful planning.

Clark Whaley, the deacon (we had only one) in my seminary pastorate, guided me in understanding the basics of Baptist church life and principles of servant leadership.

Others have been especially influential because of long, helpful association, such as Doris Tinker, with whom I have worked for more than three decades; a lifelong part of a strong Baptist family, she constantly brings helpful perspectives “from the pew,” as she terms it, to decisions and projects.

What was the impact of ministry on your family?

My family has been a blessing all my ministry.

Bobbie, my wife, a marvelously dedicated Christian, has always been positive and supportive. She has been loved and respected everywhere we have been.

The rather frequent change in ministry roles and locations has caused her, as well as Meredith and Allison, our daughters, to move and adjust to new circumstances quite often.

For example, our daughters were in many different schools from coast to coast. I was away from home a great deal traveling in relation to ministry, and Bobbie did a tremendous job of homemaking and raising two daughters, as well as serving in several leadership positions. The impact seems to have been positive as both our daughters have wonderful Baptist Christian homes.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

As with many persons, I have numerous favorites. However, three have been like theme passages: John 21:22, Proverbs 3:5-6 and James 4:13-15.

God has led me to such vastly different ministry roles and locations that I

learned I simply needed to trust, be willing to do and go as I sensed God leading and obey; human wisdom could not explain the reasons.

I went to each position with no thought of what might be next. However, before leaving one to go to another, I always had a sense of what I call “the loosening of the moorings” in which God indicated that I was going to be called to a different ministry role.

Although it was painful to leave people and places we had come to love, God always gave me a sense that it was the right thing to do.

Name something about you that would surprise people who know you well.

I was first-chair trumpet in the high school band and worked my way through college selling Fuller Brushes and janitoring.

If you could get one “do over” in ministry, what would it be, and why?

It is difficult to point to one. However, considering the decline in knowledge about Baptist beliefs and heritage among Baptist church members and the apparent devastating effect that this is having on Great Commission and Great Commandment efforts, I would spend much more time teaching, preaching, and writing about our Baptist beliefs and heritage.

I realize that many consider this a post-denominational era and that current generations are not as responsive to the gospel as in times past. However, our Baptist ancestors remained committed to Baptist beliefs in periods far more hostile than this, and God honored their often sacrificial efforts.

Baptists seem to be the most effective in sharing the gospel when they are true to the Bible-based beliefs which make us a distinctive part of the

worldwide family of Christians. Possibly, the recent decline in baptisms by Baptists is related to the decline in knowledge about and commitment to these Bible-based doctrines.