



MAPLELAWN BAPTIST CHURCH
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**Pastor
David Smith
1921-2007**

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Remembering Pastor Smith

The passing of Pastor David Smith gives us pause – a time to remember the man and a time to reflect on his service here at Maplelawn. The ministry of Pastor and Mrs. Smith here at Maplelawn goes back some 52 years to 1955. Some of you may remember 1955 but many of you weren't even born yet. The mid-to-late 50's was an exciting time. You could find people home and calling on people was met with an open door and courtesy.

From 1955 to 1966 some of the most exciting cars that Detroit ever made were produced. I remember them well and my new driver's license provided me with many new roads to travel. In the Spring of 1966 I met with Pastor Smith in his office and he showed me a road less-traveled – not with an automobile but with my walk with the Lord.

I remember it well – sitting with him in his office on one Saturday morning, his desk chair pulled up in front of me. Our knees nearly touched and a well worn Bible lay on his lap. He opened his Bible, picked out a verse and turned it around so I could read it for myself. He did this time after time as he led me to an understanding of my condition before God and my need to accept the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart. Later that year he would marry Bonnie and I, the last marriage he would perform as Pastor of Maplelawn – and then he was gone.

For me, as a new convert, my eyes were just opened. Pastor Smith was there, but now I realized why he was there. I was learning about my gifts, my Christian walk. My life was full of new beginnings – salvation, wife, home, work – it was hard to grasp all the changes going on. By the time I fully comprehended that he was actually leaving – he was gone – it happened suddenly and quickly even though I knew it was coming. And, just recently, it happened again.

Pastor and Mrs. Smith came to Maplelawn in December of 1955. Back then Maplelawn was still called Godwin Baptist Church and was located on Coolidge Street near 36th Street. The church had acquired property on Maplelawn and built a new parsonage. The congregation was poised to grow and build a new church next to the parsonage. Pastor Smith sensed the excitement and Mrs. Smith had no problem with living in a brand new parsonage.

Humble Beginnings

Born into a Christian family in 1920, Pastor Smith was the youngest of 11 children. Raised in Georgia, his father worked in a cotton mill, farmed, made cane syrup, built chimneys and, when needed, taught school.

The Smith family were members of a Congregational Church. The family was “musically inclined” and Pastor Smith learned to sing when he was only four years old. Ironically, the earliest hymn that he could recall was, “Go Preacher and Tell It To The World.”



Times were austere in the South in 1920. World War One had just ended and while President Warren Harding's campaign theme was to return the nation to "normalcy," the nation was in gear to "roar." Pastor Smith recalls his father working in a cotton mill, 6 days a week for a dollar a day. The entire family worked, in one way or another, to put food on the table. There was no car and the expanse of their world was only as far as their feet could carry them. The Smith family depended upon one another, looked out for one another and grew close to one another.

Tragedy Strikes

When Pastor Smith was 7 years old, his father died of congestive heart failure. His father's death turned the family upside down. The older children quit school to work and support the family. Within a short time of his father's passing a sister and brother also met their untimely death. Pastor Smith turned inward on his losses and pondered why God would take his father and his siblings from him.

At age 13, the confusion over God's plan for his life cleared up and his life took on a meaning of its own. He readily accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior when he understood that God had suffered a great loss as well when He allowed his Son to be crucified on the cross for the sins of the world.

At age 16 he and his mother moved to Muskegon, Michigan to live with his sister, brother-in-law and 6 children. The move gave Pastor Smith the opportunity to finish high school and set his own direction in life. His mother, unable to support herself, moved around from child to child, living in Georgia, North Carolina and Michigan.

The Love Bug Strikes

Pastor and Vivian fell in love. With a job as an apprentice in a local machine shop to support them, they were married on April 23, 1940. They dedicated their lives to the Lord and sought God's blessing on their marriage. They attended church, Sunday School and prayer meetings regularly. They taught classes, assisted with the young people's program and Pastor spoke in prayer meeting when the regular pastor was away.



World War II

It was 1941 when the dark clouds of World War II sucked up the United States in the world struggle for freedom. During the next couple of years Pastor struggled with his desire to serve in the military and the wishes of his family and Vivian to remain at home. Many of his co-workers had gone to battle – some never to return again. In February of 1943 he signed up and in March he shipped out for basic training.

While Pastor was stationed in Omaha, Nebraska, Vivian was able to join him and again in Mobile, Alabama. When he shipped out, she came back to Michigan.

Pastor sailed for the Pacific on a 103' ship that had a placard posted on the bridge that said, "This Vessel Not To Be Operated Over 50 Miles From Shore." Their journey would be interrupted from time to time as the tiny ship was tossed by the forces of nature and had to put into a harbor for repair. While they were at "war", the sea and its awesome power dished out the only damage they would sustain.

While stationed at Guam, Pastor and the others received word that Germany had surrendered and then later Japan. The war was over! Anxious to go home, he was disappointed to watch his ship sail home without him, filled with men who had served longer terms.

Biding his time on the island and helping thousands of soldiers transition their way back home he had time to contemplate his future. As he knelt to pray on New Years eve of 1946, the Lord spoke to him to go home and prepare to be a pastor or a missionary. The very next day he wrote a letter to Vivian seeking her approval. He reasoned that if he was to serve the Lord he would need her help and support. She replied, "Whatever the Lord wants you to do, I will go as your helpmate."

Studying For the Ministry

After Pastor arrived back in Muskegon he and Vivian picked up where they left off. They rented a house, he got his old job back and they became involved in their local church. Upon the invitation of a local pastor-friend, Pastor visited The Baptist College (now Cornerstone) here in Grand Rapids. He decided to take the step of faith, quit his job in Muskegon and move to Grand Rapids to start classes in the fall.

He and Vivian rented a small apartment and he found a part-time job to support them with. That following January, their first child, Shirley, was born. Between studies, work, the new baby and singing in the Sunrise Gospel Trio, the Smiths had a busy schedule.

Decatur Bible Church

Their participation with the Sunrise Gospel Trio exposed them to many churches. In 1948, with only two years of

education, Decatur Bible Church, in Decatur, Michigan invited Pastor to become their full time pastor.

Decatur Bible Church had about 20 adults attending and the position paid \$25 a week. Pastor still wanted to complete his education so, on Monday mornings he drove to Grand Rapids for school, stayed in a rented room, drove back to Decatur for Wednesday evening services, back to Grand Rapids on Thursday morning, back to Decatur on Friday evening, went calling on the congregation and community on Saturday, preached on Sunday and started the whole cycle over again on Monday.

Oakfield Baptist Church



God blessed their work in Decatur and the church grew. He graduated from the Baptist Seminary and in 1952 received a call to pastor Oakfield Baptist Church, north of Grand Rapids. While there, the family grew to two with the birth of Kenneth and then to three with the birth of Sharon.

Maplelawn Baptist Church

In late 1955 the Smiths took their pastorate to Godwin Heights Baptist Church in Grand Rapids. They moved into a new parsonage and a building program quickly took place on the lot next door. After three years in the new building the church averaged 325 in Sunday School. In 1965 the church expanded again, adding office space, a small gymnasium and Sunday School classrooms.

Burton Avenue Baptist Church

After 11 years of ministry at Maplelawn the Smiths made the decision to accept a call to Burton Avenue Baptist Church in Waterloo, Iowa. Attendance there averaged about 165 and again the Lord blessed their ministry with numeric growth and a new building.

Director Of Galilean Baptist Mission

After a fruitful 13 years in Iowa, Pastor took up leadership of Galilean Baptist Mission in Grand Rapids in 1980. The agency had 50 missionaries and had planted almost 90 churches and over 50 of them were independent. In 1985, Galilean and the Fellowship of Baptist for Home Missions

merged their operations. In 1986 Pastor and Vivian moved to Elyria, Ohio to take up the ministry of promoting church planting in North American and resigned in 1987 when a new President took over.

Back To Maplelawn And Various Ministries

Maplelawn offered Pastor and Vivian the use of the parsonage for as long as they would need it. In a pouring rain the Smith's moved back into the parsonage they had left 20 years earlier. After settling in and re-making old acquaintances, the Smiths took advantage of opportunities to work as an interim pastor in other churches. In 1988 they moved into a condo and continued to serve in various capacities whenever and wherever called. Pastor and Vivian worked three years with Maplevue Baptist Church in Portage, Michigan.

Pastor Emeritus

In his final years here at Maplelawn, Pastor Smith was given the title of Pastor Emeritus. His wise council and command of the scriptures was sought after on many occasion. The Smiths would get involved with just about anything that was asked of them. For two years they served as co-chair of the Church sponsored Community Celebration.

Their commitment to each other has certainly been a reflection of their commitment to the Lord. This church as well as the countless other lives they have touched have been blessed and enriched by their consistency and steadfastness.

What We Have Learned?

What have we learned from Pastor Smith, the life he lived and the Lord he served?

- Steadfast
- Effective
- Christ Centered
- One Soul at a Time
- Follow Up With Converts
- A Friend

The attributes could go on and on but you get the picture – the theme of his life and the thrust of his service – very down to earth but always gazing toward heaven.

Pastor David Smith was steadfast in all things – his faith, his service, his passion for the lost, his compassion for others. He, and other pastors like him, set the course for Maplelawn. He gave us vision and leadership but most of all, he gave us God's Word. His preaching and teaching gave us a clear understanding of God's Great Commission for our lives and for that of our congregation. His example of selflessness is his legacy to all of us. Well done thy good and faithful servant.