Drew Jackson, who became pastor of Loris First Baptist Church in May, intends to remain in his new hometown for a long time.

In fact, Jackson likes Loris so much he plans to retire there. “I’ve asked the Lord to allow me to invest a lifetime here,” the 38-year-old minister said. “I’ve moved around a lot but I like to stay in one place a long time. You can’t get to know people in a couple of years.”

Jackson figures he’ll preach at Loris First Baptist until the year 2025. “I’ll be 65 and can retire then,” he said with a smile.

Actually, the purpose of Jackson’s goal is twofold. First, he really likes his new surroundings. Second, the tenure of Loris First Baptist ministers hasn’t always been lengthy and Jackson realizes the stabilizing effect he can have with a long-term pastorate.

“I told the pulpit committee they needed somebody to be here for the long term,” Jackson said. “My goal is to put down roots. I plan to see my kids graduate from high school and college.”

Jackson, who likes small towns, says he’s found the perfect location in which to spend a lifetime.

“I know I’m in the right place,” he said. “There’s no doubt about that. The people have been great. This is probably one of the friendliest towns I’ve been to in my life.”

A native of Baltimore, Jackson lived for awhile in Wilmington before moving to Cherry Hill, N.J., where he went to middle school and high school. Jackson wanted to return to the South so he chose the University of South Carolina after also considering N.C. State and Campbell universities. Jackson earned a sociology degree from USC in 1983.

“I wanted to go back South. I didn’t consider a single school in the North,” Jackson said. While at USC, Jackson met his future wife, Mabry Ann Ambercrombie. Jackson and “Mabe,” who earned a journalism degree with honors from USC, were married in 1984.

Following college, Jackson worked one year in sales for Lanier 3-M. He then worked four years for Jim Walter Corp., living in Columbia, Greenville and Roanoke, Va.

All the while, Jackson was on the run...from God. He was trying to avoid entering the ministry, reasoning that God couldn’t provide him the necessary support needed to stop working full-time and attend...
minister likes his new home

seminary.

"I became a Christian my sophomore year at South Carolina when people from Campus Crusade for Christ shared Christ with me," Jackson said. "Six months later, God called me to the ministry. "That scared me to death. I'm dyslexic and a stutterer. I started preaching after that. My stuttering is gone and my dyslexia is gone. God took that away when he called me to preach.

"I ran from (the ministry) for five years (after college). I didn't see how God could provide. I was afraid. To be a minister is an intimidating task."

Jackson finally relented to God's call. He attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he received a master of divinity degree in 1991. While in seminary, the Jacksons found jobs that provided the necessary financial support.

"If God calls you and wants you, He gets you," Jackson said. (Continued On Page 2)
"God provided a wonderful way. If you rely on the Lord, He can do exceedingly and abundantly, beyond what we think." Jackson's first church was Cornerstone Baptist in Youngstown, Ohio. A year later, he moved to Central Baptist Church in Niles, Ohio. Jackson served that pastorate for 5 1/2 years and thoroughly enjoyed his stay. "The church had wonderful folks," he said.

An accident suffered by Jackson's mother-in-law eventually started the process that brought the minister to Loris. JoAnn Ambercrombie, who lives with her husband, Arnold, in Littlestown, Ohio, broke all three bones in her ankle. That resulted in an early-January visit by the Jacksons to check on Mrs. Ambercrombie.

While visiting, Jackson was invited to preach at Lakeside Baptist Church in North Myrtle Beach. Lakeside's pastor, the Rev. Jim Mezick, is a mentor to Jackson and always asked him to preach during a service when Jackson vacationed in the area.

Unknown to Jackson, Mezick called Pat Hardee, chairman of Loris First Baptist Church's pulpit committee, to inform her of Jackson's upcoming sermon. Hardee attended the service and a couple of days later, Jackson was asked to meet with the pulpit committee.

Things then quickly progressed, Jackson said. Pulpit committee members visited Jackson at his church in Ohio and following some talks, Loris First Baptist Church called Jackson to be its minister. "It was a whirlwind romance," Jackson admitted.

The call was an answer to prayer, the minister said. The Jacksons had been praying about finding a church in the Carolinas in order to be closer to Mabe's parents. Finding a church less than 25 miles away was beyond what the Jacksons figured God would supply.

"We prayed that the Lord would work it out and we'd be close. We never thought it would work out that close," Jackson said. "We never imagined it'd work out this well."

Jackson preached his first sermon on Sunday, May 3. The Jacksons moved to Loris with their three sons: Ian, 7, Taylor, 5, and Graham, 2. The pastor is pleased with all he's found during the past 3 1/2 months.

"It's been great," Jackson said. "The people have been so gracious. We've seen the church grow. There's a very positive feeling in the church right now."

"We've got a great leadership team in our deacons, our minister of music (Joey Tims), our summer youth minister (John Moody), our women's group leader (Patricia McDowell) and our church secretary (Ruby Cook). We have a great team."

Things have been buzzing since Jackson's arrival. Bible School enjoyed an enrollment of 152, with about 30 decisions made for Christ. The church youth have attended two camps. Jackson recently returned from a white-water rafting trip in Tennessee with the church's young people. "I found out rocks are hard!" Jackson joked.

Jackson also has placed great emphasis on prayer since his arrival. With Jackson's encouragement, the church has been open for 30-minute prayer sessions at three different times during mid-week. Prayer sessions are held at 5:30 a.m. on Tuesdays, at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and at 11 p.m. on Thursdays.

Participants have been praying for the church and for a revival in the community. "Those have been real successful," Jackson said of the prayer sessions.

Church members also have participated in a 40-day prayer emphasis. During that special time, prayers were lifted up for members of the community, "that people will be drawn to a closer relationship with Jesus," Jackson said.

"We've seen a lot of wonderful things come from that," he added. "My hope is that it will keep on going. I believe everything starts with prayer and out of prayer comes ministering."

"As the Bible says, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.' I believe your direction comes from being on your knees praying."

"We've had a busy summer but it's been a great summer," Jackson concluded.

The upcoming church schedule also will be busy. The church is gearing up for weekly family-night suppers on Wednesdays. As has been done in the past, there will be activities for children, music ministries for adults and Bible studies for all different age groups.

An added feature to the Wednesday gatherings this year will be five-week-long courses covering topics such as single parenting, divorce recovery, stress and parenting. At the end of the five-week period, participants will be offered a new set of topics.

"They've done this (family-night suppers) for many years," Jackson said. "What they've not had are the elective-type courses. It's taking what we've been doing and kind of expanding it. Hopefully, it will meet people's needs rather than just grouping them all together."

The Loris minister obviously is making a positive impact on his new church area. As Jackson eyes the future, he will lean heavily on God's guidance. "I know I'm not up to the task but God's grace is sufficient. He allows me to do it," Jackson said.

Jackson looks forward to what God has in store for him in Loris. "It's been a real blessing for us," Jackson said of his new hometown. "I've always loved small towns. If somebody had said pick a place to live, this is the place I'd have chosen."