

Pastor retiring after 31 years

By JIM WICKER
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After 31 years in the pulpit and more sermons than he can remember, the Rev. Raymond Webb of Burlington is retiring as pastor of Antioch Missionary Baptist Church.

Now 76, and 11 years beyond the normal retirement age, Webb will give up the Antioch pulpit following services Sunday. He is the church's founder and the only pastor it has had since it was organized on June 14, 1964.

Fittingly he plans to title his last sermon as the church's pastor "The most important things in life." In the mes-



Webb

sage, he said, he will outline for his longtime congregation his thoughts about the genuinely consequential stuff of life.

It will be one of literally hundreds of sermons that Webb has delivered in the 1,600-plus Sundays that have elapsed since he and a small band of 20 other people formed the church in a literally isolated section of southern Alamance County more than three decades ago.

Webb can't put an exact figure on

the number of sermons he has preached, but he has missed only two Sundays at Antioch since 1964 — on one of those absences, he was preaching at Jerusalem in Israel. On the other occasion he was attending his mother's funeral.

But he does know he has baptized more than 300 converts over the years.

Probably no one in the initial group of worshipers would have dared imagine at the beginning that the church would one day grow to nearly 180 members, and would have a sanctuary large enough for 500 people.

"We started in an old wooden church building that hadn't been used in about 30 years," Webb said. "It

didn't even have a road to it."

He said the Antioch congregation bought the old church, formerly the Hilltop Mission, and its two acres of land from the Wesleyan Methodist Church organization.

Using mostly volunteer labor, Webb and the other church leaders quickly got the old church patched up sufficiently for services, and it served them until 1966, when a 150-seat sanctuary was built. The congregation continued to grow, though, and in mid 1974 the present brick church was built.

The old wooden church is still stand-

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ing, and the 1966 edifice serves as a fellowship center.

Despite the problem with the road, people managed to find their way to the Antioch church in its early days.

Still, not having adequate access was a problem, and Webb said he finally got it resolved by calling on a long-time friend, then Gov. Bob Scott.

"Bob Scott and I went to school together years ago. He helped us a lot, and we got a road to the church," Webb said.

Webb didn't start out in life with plans to be a preacher. A native of Greenville, S.C., he was a youngster when his parents moved to Alamance County.

Until he was 38 years old he worked as a loom fixer in local textile mills operated by Burlington Industries and Copland Inc.

Converted in 1956, he said he was called to preach a few years later. He enrolled in Piedmont Bible College in Winston-Salem, and in 1961 he was licensed as a minister at Belmont Baptist Church.

He was a supply pastor at

several area churches for a while, then he served as assistant pastor at Belmont Baptist Church before founding the Antioch church.

Over the years, four ministers — including one who serves as a missionary to Brazil — have come out of the Antioch church. One, the Rev. Steve Loy of Burlington, will succeed Webb as pastor of the church. Loy has been the church's associate pastor for the past 10 years.

But his retirement doesn't mean he's calling it quits when it comes to preaching the Gospel, Webb said. He plans to continue accepting invitations to hold revivals, and said he will be available as a temporary supply pastor.

Webb is married to the former Ruth West of Burlington. Their daughters are Norma Edwards, Imogene Ingram and Julia Ann Sykes, all of Burlington, and their son is Johnny C. Webb of Burlington. The Webbs have 10 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.