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YOUR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Your religious heritage is a feature devoted to the many places of worship in this area. Each week, *Gazette* Lifestyle reporter Elsie Hamilton takes a look at one church or synagogue and its leaders, history and congregation.

291 Small church coaxed pastor out of retiring

By Elsie Hamilton

Gazette Lifestyle Reporter

A short-cut to his son's house led the Rev. T. Alfred Woolbright out of retirement.

"My son, Michael, told me about the shortcut from I-85 that leads through McAdenville up Hickory Grove Road to his house in Mount Holly," Rev. Woolbright said. "In the nice, little Springwood community I noticed Sunset Forest Baptist Church and its empty pastorium."

Rev. Woolbright was getting ready to retire from Durham Memorial Baptist Church, Charlotte, where he has served the past five years as associate minister in education and outreach. Although his 65th birthday was coming up in January, he said, he wasn't really enthusiastic about retiring after serving almost 39 years in the ministry.

"I learned that Sunset Forest had been without a full-time pastor since the death of Rev. Fred King in 1984," Rev. Woolbright said. "Pharr chaplain Bill Miller was serving as interim pastor."

Without a full-time shepherd, Rev. Woolbright said, the Sunset Forest flock had dwindled, and some of the congregational enthusiasm had waned.

The outcome was that Rev. Woolbright offered his services as minister, and the congregation accepted.

"Jan. 4 was a special day for my wife Lila and me," Rev. Woolbright said. "The Durham Memorial congregation remembered us with a nice purse, which helped replace a Pontiac that needed replacing. And that night I preached my first sermon at Sunset Forest."

The Sunset Forest congregation was "birthed" by sisters Myrtle and Lillie Abernethy. Although single, the Misses Abernethy were "mothers" to many children in the Springwood community who wanted to learn about God and Jesus.

For three years the sisters taught community children, using all of the available space in their home for classrooms. Then Hickory Grove Church rented a house for classes and provided teachers. Later the State Mission Board agreed to buy a lot and First Baptist Church, Belmont, assumed responsibility for half of the cost.

In the summer of 1947 men and boys of the community began work on a building. On Sept. 7, Sunset Forest Baptist Church was constituted with 61 members and the Rev. Alfred Lineberger as pastor. It was his earlier work in teaching Sunset Forest youngsters that led Lineberger to study for the ministry.

So now Sunset Forest again has a pastor named Alfred. This Alfred, a native of Abbeville, S.C., is a graduate of Furman University and New Orleans Theological Baptist Seminary. A U.S. navy veteran



The Rev. T. Alfred Woolbright is pastor of Sunset Forest Baptist Church.

Kermit Hull/The Gazette

who served during World War II, he was ordained into the ministry while at Furman and served as music director at a Greenville, S.C., church.

Most of Rev. Woolbright's preaching career was in the South Carolina State Convention, where he served positions in churches and associations affiliated with the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Here at Sunset Forest I will be seeking to shepherd the church family, enlisting them in the ministries of the church, training for ministries,

evangelizing in the community and organizing a more effective ministry for all age groups," Rev. Woolbright said.

"I love people, and I'm here to minister. Sunset Forest has a tremendous challenge in the greater Springwood area. I'm a fellow who's up and at them, and I don't want to sit on the sidelines. I'm a called preacher — not a professional preacher."

Rev. Woolbright said he hopes to serve Sunset Forest as long as he can be effective in the ministry and be helpful for people.

Rev. Woolbright listed in Marquis Who's Who In Religion

Marquis Who's Who in Religion, Wilmette, Ill., recently entered Rev. Thurman Alfred Woolbright of Mount Holly as a component of the Marquis Biographical Library. It is a supplement to Marquis Who's Who Volumes, the 47th Edition of Who's Who in America.

Rev. and Mrs. Woolbright, the former Lila Sutherland, have lived for three years in Mount Holly following his retirement. Born Jan. 9, 1922, in Abbeville, S.C., he is the son of Elijah Prophet Woolbright and Edith Mae Brown Woolbright.

Rev. Woolbright received the bachelor of Arts Degree from Furman University in 1949, the Bachelor of Divinity degree from

New Orleans Baptist theological Seminary in 1952 and the Master of Divinity Degree in 1975.

He studied at Princeton Theological Institute in 1965. Rev. Woolbright was licensed for the ministry by the Southside Baptist Church, Abbeville, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention in 1946 and was ordained by the church in May 1948.

He directed music for Welcome Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., 1946-48, and pastored the New Zion Baptist Church, Kentwood, La., 1950-52 while attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Rev. Woolbright became pastor

of a field of churches in Laurens County, S.C. He entered full-time ministry in 1953 at the Cross Hill Church. From 1954-59 he was pastor of the First Baptist Church, Iva, S.C., and from 1959-66 was pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Lyman, S.C.

In 1973 he became pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Gaffney, S.C., then became associate pastor in education, outreach, and youth with Woodfields Baptist Church of Greenwood, S.C. in 1976.

He was associate pastor of Second Baptist Church, Belton, S.C. for four years and from 1982-85 served as associate pastor in education/outreach with the Durham

Memorial Baptist Church, Charlotte, from where he retired. Following official retirement, he served the Sunset Forest Baptist Church in Gastonia from 1986-88.

Rev. Woolbright was the founder of S.O.C.K.S. (Serving Others With Concern and Kindness in Springwood).

During World War II he served in the U.S. Navy in the captain's office on board the USS Massachusetts (1942-44), and with the Navy Air Force on the West Coast (1944-45). He served aboard ship at Casablanca, West Africa and in the South Pacific during the first two years in service.

He has authored several special papers during his college and pastoral years, including "The Christmas Story In Song," 1950, and "A History of Abbeville," in 1948.

Rev. Woolbright and his wife are now members of the First Baptist Church, Mount Holly. The following statement was submitted to Marquis Who's Who in Religion at their request on "Thoughts of Life":

"As I have come to retirement years of the Christian ministry, looking back I could wish I were able to begin again. Having the ex-



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See Rev. Woolbright, Page 6B

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From Page 4B

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The following men were licensed and ordained for the ministry during Rev. Woolbright's own ministry: Dr. Ted Mears, Rev. Charles Butler, Rev. Gerald Lawton, Rev. Sumter West, Rev. Paul Burnette, Rev. Joe Dempsey, Rev. Duke Dickson, Rev. David Levi, Rev. David Owenby, Rev. Marshall Foster, Rev. George Cline, Rev. David Cromer, Rev.

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Page 4B - ~~THE BELMONT BANNER~~ THE MOUNT HOLLY NEWS - Wednesday, August 4, 1993

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NEWS
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Retired pastor²⁹¹ included in Who's Who

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A retired pastor, Mr. Woolbright is a native of Abbeville, SC. He was ordained by Southwide Baptist Church in Abbeville in 1946. He earned a BA degree from Furman University in 1949, a bachelor of divinity degree in 1952 and a masters in divinity degree in 1975.

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