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JOURNAL OF THE
Fourteenth Session
of the
LOUISIANA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
of the
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
South Central Jurisdiction
held at
CENTENARY COLLEGE
and
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

June 4-6, 1984



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Conference Journal Editor

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to Napoleon Avenue Church in 1980. They served here until the comparatively rare Jakob Creutzfeldt disease took Wayne on July 19, 1983.

Memorial services were held in the Napoleon Avenue Church, with Bishop J. Kenneth Shamblin and the Rev. William C. Blakely officiating. Interment was in the Speights family plot in the cemetery at Bassfield, Mississippi.

Wallace P. Blackwood

WILLIAM FERRELL PLEDGER

On November 20, 1983, the Keithville United Methodist Church observed a special day honoring the life and ministry of Dr. W. F. Pledger. He was made "Pastor Emeritus" of the church and the fellowship hall was named in his honor. The sanctuary was filled beyond capacity and letters of goodwill came from all over the world. Just two months later, many of those same people were back in that church for his service of memorial.

Dr. Pledger was born in Smith County, Texas, on May 10, 1910. He was educated at Southwestern University, Duke University, and the Hartford Seminary Foundation. He received the Ph.D. from Hartford in 1944. Among his many and varied accomplishments in the Methodist ministry were his years as pastor, missionary to India, and Professor of Sociology and Religion at Centenary College.

He was a leader in his chosen field of work, and in many ways he was a pioneer far ahead of his time. His concern for tolerance and human understanding paved the way for better relationships wherever he served.

Dr. Pledger will long be remembered in many parts of the world as a good and caring man who gave himself without reservation on behalf of others and who served his Lord with deep devotion.

He is survived by his wife Shirley of Keithville, daughter Cisly Morgan of Keithville, two sons, Talmadge Pledger of San Angelo, Texas, and Dr. Norman Roy Pledger of North Little Rock, Arkansas. He had seven grandchildren and one great grandchild. He is also survived by a host of former students and parishioners whose lives have been blessed by his ministry.

C. Gerald Richardson

JOHN BYARS SHEARER

A servant of Jesus Christ whose work was with God's children here but whose citizenship was in heaven might well be an epitaph for the Reverend John Shearer. One of his favorite passages of Scripture was Philippians 3:20-21 which reads as follows in the New American Standard Version of the Bible:

"For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

John Byars Shearer was born August 14, 1899 at Houston, Mississippi and passed from this life in Ruston, Louisiana, February 21, 1984. He was the son of Edward Baxter Shearer and Henrietta McDonald Byars Shearer.

He attended the Houston public schools and graduated from Houston High School in 1920. He attended Millsaps College and Louisiana State University receiving his B.A. degree from Millsaps.

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He served in the United States Army in both World Wars. In 1917-1919 and in 1942-1946 he served in France, England, and Germany and in North Africa and Italy in 1942-46.

His ministry was in the North Mississippi and Louisiana Conferences as well as in the Chaplaincy. He supplied the Teccopola Circuit of the North Mississippi Conference of the M.E. Church South 1924-25. He was received on Trail into the Conference in 1925 and served Harrisville and Braxton, Benton, and Ocean Springs and Mississippi Louisiana Avenue, New Orleans, Guedan, Clinton and Gibsland. He transferred to the Louisiana Conference of The Methodist Church and served Grand Cane, Trout, Marksville, and Jackson. He retired in June 1969.

He was married to Helen Irene Louise Kearney of Flora, Mississippi. To this union were born four children: Minetta Louise (Mrs. Aaron C. Greer); Helen Irene (Mrs. Cleveland F. Kerry); John Byars, Jr.; and Edgar Kearney. His first wife died February 18, 1937. Later he married Glennie Burkhalter of Gibsland, Louisiana and they had one son, Milo Edward.

Rev. and Mrs. John Shearer made their home in Ruston, Louisiana after his retirement where they maintained an active relationship with Trinity United Methodist Church. Brother Shearer attended choir rehearsals regularly with his wife, and was considered the chaplain of the choir.

The funeral service celebrating his entrance into the heavenly home of which he has been a citizen all of these years was held in Trinity United Methodist Church February 24, 1984 and with Dr. Merlin W. Merrill and Rev. M. Rolly Walker officiating and Rev. James R. McLelland playing the organ.

Merlin W. Merrill

FRANCIS MARION STAGE, JR.

Frank Stage was born January 24, 1919 in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from Arkansas State in Jonesboro to pursue a secular career. These plans were interrupted by the call to military service in the Navy in World War II where Frank served on a PT boat.

After his release from military service, he acted on a call to serve in the Christian ministry that had been growing in his life for years. He was released from the Navy in April, and the next fall, he entered the Theology School at Southern Methodist University where he received a Bachelor of Divinity Degree.

On August 3, 1944, Frank did one of the smartest things that he ever did. He married Janelle Fowler from Star City, Arkansas at First Methodist Church in Pine Bluff. They had four children: Mary Beth Stage, Dr. Ben Stage, Dr. Steve Stage, and Mrs. Pamela Stage Booker.

He was received on probation with the North Arkansas Conference in 1945, then in 1946 as Deacon, and 1947 into full connection and ordained an Elder. While in Arkansas, Frank served on the Aubrey Circuit, Kenselt and Wheatley, Blytheville, and Leachville charges.

Louisiana was fortunate to receive several pastors from Arkansas when we were served by the same bishop. One of these was Frank Stage. He served the Barksdale, Blanchard-Belcher, Lottie-Rosedale, New Roads, Kentwood-Mt. Herman, Renville-Crew Lake and Heflin-Brushwood charges in our conference.

On April 22, Easter Sunday evening, Frank suffered a fatal heart attack and shared the new life of Christ's Easter people with His Lord. Funeral services were held for him in his beloved Blanchard United Methodist Church in the lovely sanctuary which was built during his pastorate there. The Rev. Ralph Mann and John R. Johns officiated, and Dr. Douglas L. McGuire preached.

Praise be to God who gave us our friend, Frank, to share his zest for living, his sense of humor, and his dedication to service. We thank God for the heritage that is left to his children. Thanks be to God who has given Frank the victory of eternal life.

John R. Johns