

# First Baptist mourns death of pastor

By Bob Belcher

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— Dr. David Edwards, pastor and leader of the congregation at Corsicana's First Baptist Church, died Friday from injuries suffered in an automobile accident near Hubbard.

Edwards was involved in a two car collision about 4:20 p.m. Friday on State Highway 31, approximately 2.5 miles west of Hubbard, according to the Department of Public Safety report on the collision. He was pronounced dead at 5:20 p.m. at Hillcrest Hospital in Waco.

Investigators said Edwards was westbound on Highway 31 when his 2001 Explorer was struck head-on by a 2004 Dodge truck driven by Joseph Pass, 56, of Athens. The DPS report said that Pass crossed the center lane and struck Edwards' vehicle head on. Road conditions were listed as "dry," the DPS report said.

Pass was hospitalized at Hillcrest Hospital and was reported to be in stable condition late Friday, according to the DPS.

Church members joined in prayer Friday night at First Baptist Church after hearing the news of their pastor's death.

"Sadness and shock," said Monty Trimble, chairman of the Board of Deacons at First Baptist Church, was the feeling of the church family Saturday. "But, we know he is in a perfect place now."

"He was so dedicated to the church," Trimble said. "He was trying to reach people of all ages. He was very missionary minded."

"We're very saddened, but God is in control and we feel things will work out to His purpose and plan," said First Baptist member Don Tekell on Saturday. Tekell praised Edwards' leadership in the church, and for the church family.

"His leadership was very positive. He was very outgoing ... we'll miss his enthusiasm and excitement for spreading the Gospel."

Former pastor B.F. Risinger Jr. said Edwards brought a vision and an energy to the church and its work in the community.

"I can say without question he served in a wonderful way," Risinger said. "He had many wonderful approaches and ideas that he put into practice ... ministry to people who were hungry ... ministering to our Hispanic community as well. It was enhanced a great deal by his encouragement.

"He has shown the practical application of Christianity in a lot of ways."

Edwards, 51, answered the call to take the pulpit at First Baptist in 2006, replacing longtime pastor Risinger. Edwards and his wife, Lyndy, were preparing to adopt two children from Taiwan later this year, a brother and sister. They were scheduled to leave Tuesday for a trip to Taiwan.

Deadra Gage served on the search committee that eventually selected Edwards to take the First Baptist pulpit in 2006. She said the committee saw Edwards as a leader and visionary for the church.

"He knew through his prayer time the direction that the Lord wanted us to go," she said. "He gave us freedom to do ministries that we had not done before.

"He received everybody," she said. "It didn't matter where you came from, your background, who you were or anything ... the church takes on the character of the pastor. I feel that's what he brought to us with that."

"He was very visionary. He was very inclusive," said Mike Gage, Deadra's husband. "He had a strong desire to see the lost reached, and then after salvation, he wanted them to be disciples."

Dr. Scott Middleton said the loss of Edwards affects not only the church family, but the community as a whole.

"He was a man of much energy that was directed toward things of eternal significance," Middleton said. "He loved his family and took a great deal of pride in them. I think he had his priorities in order."

Middleton also recalled Edwards as a man of "active compassion" that reached across generations.

"He had interested many young couples in the church," Middleton said. "He had a real active vision for including those who were not 'traditional' church members ... he had a real interest in the growing Hispanic

community in Corsicana.”

A 2006 profile of Edwards in the Daily Sun told the story of his ministry career, one that did not originally include leading a congregation.

“I became a Christian at the age of 17, and the man who introduced me to Christ was going on a mission trip to India,” Edwards said in that 2006 interview. “I wanted to go with him.”

Edwards friend told him he didn’t think he was ready for that kind of trip yet, so Edwards chose to attend Wayland Baptist University, preparing for a future making mission trips. His time at the university led him in a different direction.

“In that time span (in college) I realized that this wasn’t just about a mission trip,” he said. “This was more about my direction in life, and what I was going to do.”

Edwards, then 22 years old and fresh out of college, took on his first ministry at the small church in Kansas. It was a new church, and Edwards spent four years there as he finished up his Master of Divinity degree.

“I learned there from some very loving and patient people what it meant to be a pastor,” Edwards said. “I was told that being a pastor meant loving the people, and preaching God’s word. Do that.”

Edwards’ described his philosophy of service as one of “relevant reverence.”

“I use the term ‘relevant’ a great deal,” Edwards explained, “how to be really relevant, or meaningful to this community, to reach people for Christ, to reach families, to make a difference in the lives of children and young people.

“Churches that I’ve served before, we did practical ministries in the community, things as simple as helping someone rake leaves. We called it acts of kindness. We wanted to be like Christ, in terms of doing what Jesus would do. The church is here to serve the community. That’s why we exist.”

Edwards also believed that the church played a vital role in the family unit.

“The church’s strength is the strength of the families that are in the church. One of our most significant ministries is teaching, touching and helping families become strong,” he said, “whether it be ministries to families, teaching of how to have healthy families. It’s the family of faith here, reaching out to the community.”

Edwards is survived by his wife, Lyndy; daughters, Emily of Pennsylvania, and Kate Mullaney and her husband Brian of Georgetown; and a son, Evan, who is a sophomore at Corsicana High School.

First Baptist Church has scheduled only one morning worship for Sunday. The normal 8:30 a.m. service will not take place. A bible fellowship will be held at 9:30 a.m., followed by an 11 a.m. service, led by former interim pastor Milton Cunningham.