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News for the week of Wednesday, November 14, 2007

Bivocational Pastor of the Year

### Joe White leads small Cleveland congregation to grow

By Connie Davis Bushey

11/14/2007

Baptist and Reflector

CLEVELAND — Things are looking up at Thompson Springs Baptist Church here.

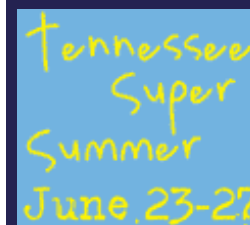
Worship attendance has doubled and giving has more than doubled in the past two years that Joe White has been pastor. He has baptized 16 people. During this year the church began saving for a new sanctuary.

In addition, White has been named Bivocational Pastor of the Year by the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

White, who also works full-time for the Information Technology department of Cleveland Utilities, said he was shocked and embarrassed when learning of the recognition.

“There are so many great preachers in the state of Tennessee,” said White. He sees the award as a “testimony of God’s love and He’s done it through the people in this church.”

Serving the church has been rewarding, said White. A small core group of people remained after





some struggles at Thompson Springs Baptist. Those people were “hungry for the Word and eager to work,” said White who is serving as pastor of his first church.

The members help him visit door to door on Saturday mornings in the community, which is rural and located near Old Fort, southeast of Cleveland. Church members can visit shut-ins, people who visited Sunday School, or just folks in the neighborhood, explained White, possibly leaving flyers about an upcoming activity of the church.

He enjoys these efforts, but his passion is preaching, it is clear.

He began preaching while a member of an independent Baptist church in Cleveland after surrendering to the call to the ministry.

At Thompson Springs White has preached on the parables, miracles, Habakkuk, and the 10 greatest men and 10 greatest women of the Bible. He surveyed the congregation before developing the last series. He recently preached on Sunday nights on the measure of a church. The first months of his pastorate White preached from Revelation because of the request of an elderly lady who was a member.

One result of these efforts is that worship attendance is up to about 85 each Sunday morning and about 65 on Wednesday nights.

White said he really enjoys the Wednesday service. It is the “most biblical service we have,” said White. The congregation prays, studies, and then discusses Scripture, he noted. He also knows that people make “a special effort to come” because it is in the middle of the work week.

White also has been amazed at the congregation when it comes to fundraising for the larger sanctuary. As part of the effort, White challenged Thompson Springs to a “Reverse Sunday.” The schedule of Sunday School and worship was reversed. Because worship was first, people were personally invited to Sunday School, which many attended. White also challenged members to a reverse tithe — giving 90 percent of their income rather than 10 percent. “I had very little faith,” said White. The congregation gave almost \$15,000 that day. “It’s amazing,” he said. Since the first of the year giving added to funds already saved have totaled \$115,273.

White noted Thompson Springs has a “great group of deacons” and an active Woman’s Missionary Union. Members of the church have served on an associational missions team to New York City and regularly serve in local ministries. The church also offers TeamKid every Wednesday night drawing about 25 children.

White said he is helped in keeping his busy schedule by Andrea, his wife, who is a homemaker. She publishes the weekly bulletin and checks on members by phone. The couple have two daughters, Whitney, 7, and Makenzie, 4.

The pastor has been asked by some how he is going to grow a congregation out here in the country. White said, "I'm not. The Lord will grow the congregation if we just obey Him. ... He promised to build His church. We just need to get on board with the Lord."

Evangelism, missions and revival will come if God is the goal, White said. He tries to lead with a balance of compassion and conviction or love and truth.

Phil Taylor, director of missions, Bradley Baptist Association, based in Cleveland, said White "is a caring shepherd of his flock and has a humble heart." Taylor added that he can "connect with all age groups."

Annita Arthur, church treasurer, said God sent White "after a storm" in the church. "He was just the fresh wind we needed," she said.

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