

The Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle



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Leading the celebration, from left, were Emerson Falls, Sandy Wisdom-Martin, Amy Cordova, ‘Gus’ Smith, Julie Busler and Todd Fisher. Photo Provided

Native American LINK ministry Celebrates 25th anniversary

by Chris Doyle, Baptist Messenger Managing Editor

Native American LINK (Living in Neighborly Kindness) celebrated 25 years of ministry with a celebration ceremony during Indian Falls Creek on Aug. 2, 2023.

The most prominent element of Native American LINK is the Native Praise choir, which sang songs in native languages as well as in English during the program.

Native American LINK provides ministry opportunities, supports, promotes and participates in mission work, provides training opportunities, and offers outreach programs in Western Oklahoma.

Augusta “Gus” Smith, executive director of Native American LINK, emceed the celebration ceremony, paying tribute to Willene Pierce, founder of the ministry, who passed away in 2014.

Smith recalled what Pierce said when she stepped down as executive director.

“She gave us options of how we can handle the ministry,” Smith said about Pierce. “The last option she gave us was to disband. Then she walked away and said, ‘You all decide.’ We decided we would not disband. That would be so disrespectful of everything she accomplished. We have carried on, and we are excited about beginning the next 25 years!”

Native Praise also was founded by Pierce, and the choir will celebrate its 25th anniversary next year with plans of doing a choir tour.

“Indeed, you are our ambassadors,” said Emerson Falls, Native

American ministry partner for Oklahoma Baptists, during the celebration event. “Every chance I get, I recommend this group to sing. They’ve been all over the nation and the world having represented us well.”

Native Praise sang twice at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, in 2002 and in 2014. The choir also performed and did mission work in England and in Ukraine.

Smith mentioned a special moment for Native Praise happened when Anthony Jordan retired as executive director-treasurer of Oklahoma Baptists.

“The only thing he requested for his retirement celebration was to have Native Praise sing,” Smith said. “He looked at us as Oklahoma Ambassadors.”

***Willene Pierce
inducted into
Baptist Hall of
Fame, P. 15***

Todd Fisher, current executive director-treasurer of Oklahoma Baptists, spoke during the celebration event, commending Native American LINK and Native Praise.

“LINK and Native Praise are some of the greatest ambassadors to Oklahoma and to our nation of the importance of Native American ministry,” Fisher said. “And the other thing is the role that women play in our churches and in the various ministries. Women have such an important role reaching so many people and serving in so many ways. I want to say ‘thank you.’”

Others speaking were Amy Cordova, missions and women’s ministry partner of Oklahoma Baptists; Julie Busler, Oklahoma WMU president; and Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director-treasurer of the national WMU.

“What you do matters,” Wisdom-Martin said. “Your influence, your ministry, your life—it will reverberate for all eternity. Thank you for what you do. We celebrate 25 years with you.”



Native Praise sings during the anniversary celebration.

OBHC: Serving children since 1903

Editor's Note: Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children (OBHC) is the largest provider of private, not-for-profit, residential childcare in the state. It is an affiliate of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (Oklahoma Baptists), which is comprised of 1,700 Oklahoma Southern Baptist churches. OBHC does not charge for any of its services, nor accepts government funds. OBHC is funded through the generosity of individuals and businesses, as well as gifts from Southern Baptist churches through offerings and the Cooperative Program. The ministry does not discriminate on placement based on race, color, national origin, or religious affiliation.

by James Swain, President, Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children

Several months ago, I was honored to be elected as the fourth President of Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children (OBHC), the oldest, continual, cooperative work in Oklahoma Baptist life that started in 1903.

When I began to prayerfully consider God's call to this assignment, I started to explore some of the history of the work. In doing so, I came across the book Oklahoma Baptist historian J.M. Gaskin wrote for the Diamond Jubilee of the work in 1978 simply titled, *The Child Care Ministry of Oklahoma Baptists*.

Lowell Milburn, Director of the Department of Child Care at the time, wrote the introduction, and in the third paragraph, penned these words that captured my heart:

"The Psalmist said in the long ago, *'When my mother and father forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.'* Can you feel the heart-break in those words? The experience was a reality for the Psalmist. And it is real to thousands of children and youth today. They have been forsaken, abused, and neglected.

I believe the Lord led Oklahoma Baptists to 'take up' these boys and girls. God led our Baptist forefathers to start an Orphan's Home back in 1903, even before Oklahoma became a state or the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO) was founded."

In October 1902, J.A. Scott, then pastor of Washington Avenue Church in Oklahoma City, made a motion at the Oklahoma Baptist Convention "to consider the propriety of founding and locating a Baptist Orphan's Home for Oklahoma." In typical Baptist fashion, the messengers elected him to serve as the superintendent and authorized him to begin the ministry as soon as he could find a location for a home and take in children for care.

Scott gave his wife credit for the beginning of what was originally



James Swain

named the Oklahoma Baptist Orphans Home. Soon after the Scotts came to Oklahoma City, he accepted the call as pastor of Washington Avenue Church. Very soon after Scott began his ministry, his wife encountered a mother who was near death and living in a little shack in an alley near the church.

The mother asked Mrs. Scott to find a home for her baby. The girl, Gladys Smith, lived in the Scott home until the formal opening of the Oklahoma Baptist Orphans Home on March 15, 1903. The first location of the Home was in a small house on Pottawatomie St. (Neither Washington Avenue Baptist Church nor Pottawatomie Street exist in Oklahoma City today).

By the time the home was officially opened in March 1903, the



OBHC President James Swain visits with residents of the children's home in Owasso, which opened in 1973.

first two residents, Gladys Smith and Annabelle Hunt, had already been admitted. In September of 1903, the Baptist General Convention of the Indian Territory voted to join the Oklahoma Baptist Convention in "fully establishing and sustaining a Baptist Orphan's Home in Oklahoma City." For 120 years the Baptists of Oklahoma have been, and continue to be, engaged in this good, Gospel work.

On June 1, 1903, the Home was moved to a frame building on one and a half stories on West Pottawatomie Street. Nine children were in residence. In 1905, the joint Boards of the Baptist General Convention of Indian Territory and the Oklahoma State Baptist Convention accepted a bid from Oklahoma City of 40 acres of land and \$2,000 to move the Home to its location at NW 63rd St. and Pennsylvania Ave. Ownership of the Home was transferred to the BGCO in 1917.

I share the conviction of Milburn that God has called Oklahoma Baptists to "take up" the children of our state who are in need. I am privileged to stand on the shoulders of those who have given their lives in faithful service to this work. I am eternally grateful for the faithful service of those who have gone before and seek to be a faithful steward of what the Lord has provided, and they have stewarded well in the past.

This year is momentous in the history of this work in Oklahoma Baptist life. It is the 120th year that this great work has ministered across Oklahoma. It also marks the 70th anniversary of the work at

Boys Ranch Town in Edmond, and also marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the OBHC campus in Owasso. These milestones are a testimony to the grace of God and the faithfulness of the people called Oklahoma Baptists.

Let me briefly talk about each milestone in reverse order.

On Easter Sunday, April 22, 1973, ground was broken on the first building for the Owasso campus. Mr. and Mrs. J. Ray Smith donated 136 acres of land where the current Owasso Children's Home and Baptist Village Community are established. The first building was the White City Cottage, named for the Smith's church that has since been renamed Braden Park Church. Darryl Deborde was the Smith's pastor, and is still pastor of Braden Park 50 years later. He recently shared with our OBHC trustees at the board meeting in Owasso his perspective on the establishment of the campus, and they are still very supportive of the work that takes place there.

The work at Owasso quickly grew to a full campus that provides cottages for boys and girls, but also is home to the Children's Hope Program, a family-focused ministry for single mothers and their children. The new Brooks-Brown Super Cottage—two cottages under one roof—was completed in June 2023 and houses the boys living on campus. Melissa Litke became the Campus Administrator in June 2022, and has led the campus to experience growth in staff and residents. The campus has truly experienced a rebirth in the last year, and is positioned for continued growth and development.

On May 18, 1953, the Jimmy Johnson Foundation, named for the late son of Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Johnson, made a gift of the money and the 160 acres that were used to establish the Boys Ranch Town (BRT). Immediately following this action, work began to establish BRT on the land where it still stands. Formal groundbreaking ceremonies were held on Oct. 12, 1953, with an estimated crowd of more than 2,500 in attendance.

Today, there is a fully developed campus with cottages, transitional living apartments, and other buildings needed to support the operation. BRT has enjoyed the strong leadership of Charles Boldin, Tony Kennedy, and Brent Thackerson through the years. Bo Blakey has served as the executive-director of BRT for the past two years



OBHC Birthday Banks have been around since 1929. The little bank with the red roof is a place to invest in the future of the life of a child.

and is advancing the work like those who have gone before him.

The “Ranch” has a cattle operation, horse and show program, along with numerous other activities for the young men. The residents of BRT have the opportunity to participate in many extracurricular activities at church, school, and on campus. A couple of the highlights of the year are the Drive-Thru Christmas Pageant that typically takes place the first weekend in December and the rodeo that takes place in September. We celebrated the 70 years of ministry at the rodeo on Sept.30 and will have a larger celebration for 75 years in 2028.

Today, 120 years after Gladys Smith and Annabelle Hunt were taken in, Baptists of Oklahoma continue through the ministry of OBHC to provide help and hope to the hurting through demonstrating the love of Christ to them. In the home office at the Baptist Building in Oklahoma City, there is a tree on the wall that was made by now retired communications director, Steve Childers. It is called the “Century Tree” and Steve created it for the Centennial celebration in 2003.

The tree is made of upholstery tacks; each tack represents a child cared for by Oklahoma Baptists. The tree has 9,670 tacks and, today, we know that more than 12,000 children have been cared for in our 120-year history. That does not include the thousands of lives that have been saved through the almost 40-year history of Hope Pregnancy Centers, and the numerous lives that have been changed through our Adoption and Foster Care Services.

This ministry has been meeting the physical needs of children by providing them shelter, clothing, and food. It has met the mental needs of children by providing the education and training they need to become productive adults. It has met the emotional needs of children by providing a home filled with love and support. It has met the spiritual needs of children by consistently sharing the good news of the Gospel with them.

Praise the Lord, we have seen thousands of these children place their faith in Jesus Christ. Oklahoma Baptists have truly “taken up” the children of our state!



Each year, boys who live on the BRT campus participate in a rodeo. They entertain the entire family as they compete in different categories.

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame

Evelyn Cline

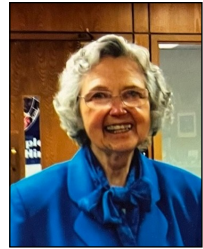
1925—2014

Inducted 2023

by Richard McCullough, member, Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Evelyn Virginia Cline was born July 8, 1925, to Clarence and Rose Roe, in Wichita, Kan., where her parents worked in a used furniture store. Evelyn had three younger brothers whom she tended to while her parents worked. Evelyn accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior and was baptized in 1936 at age 11 at Faith Baptist church (now Immanuel Baptist) in Wichita, Kan. Her father was saved and baptized at about the same time. She graduated from Wichita East High School in 1943.

On May 23, 1945, in Wichita, she married Dayton Cline, a Marine Corp veteran she met before the war and had corresponded with by letter for three years. After their marriage, they moved to Hastings, Neb., stationed at the Naval Depot for the next six months. Moving back to Wichita, and attended Immanuel Baptist Church, where Evelyn played piano and taught a Sunday School class. To this union, three children were born: Janice, David, and Karen. Her husband was not a Christian and their marriage was difficult and unsettled.



Evelyn Cline

After her children grew up and left home, combined with her stressful marriage, Evelyn experienced depression and other mental health issues and received treatment. During this period, Evelyn's faith and intense Bible study helped her heal. The family moved, due to an urban renewal project, to southwest Wichita and then attended Allerton Baptist Church where she continued to teach a Sunday School class and play piano.

Evelyn's husband developed cancer and became unable to provide much financial support, so Evelyn worked at numerous odd jobs and eventually became an insurance agent to help provide for the household. During their 30 years of marriage, she prayed that her husband Dayton would accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior and just before he passed away in 1975, her prayers were answered, as her husband called upon the Lord asking His forgiveness and receiving Him as Savior.

After her husband's passing, the Lord sent women in crisis to her home through her pastor. God had prepared her through her own past difficult experiences as she guided those women in desperate situations with Christian spiritual and practical help.

Eventually, Evelyn received God's call to missions. She sold her house and after contacting David Bunch, Director of the Mission

Service Corps of the Home Mission Board (HMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, she attended orientation at the Glorieta Baptist training center at Glorieta, New Mexico, as a volunteer. While at Glorieta, Evelyn determined her calling was to work with women in crisis. As a result, the HMB directed her to the Women's Crisis Center Board in Atlanta, Ga., where she was accepted. For the next nine months, Evelyn served at the Women's Crisis Center in Atlanta training and developing her skills.

Eventually, God led Evelyn to the Baptist Women's Shelter in Tulsa. She also became a member of Eastwood Baptist Church. Founded in 1980 as the only domestic violence shelter in Tulsa, the shelter operated out of an old church building downtown, housing more than 7,000 women and children over the next 14 years.

The Baptist Women's Shelter in Tulsa later changed its name to DaySpring Villa Women's and Childrens Shelter. In 1995, the facility moved west of downtown Tulsa to Sand Springs, Oklahoma, and received its certification as a domestic violence shelter from the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. DaySpring Villa became one of only two certified shelters in the Tulsa metro area, and the only faith-based certified domestic violence shelter in the state of Oklahoma. In 2012, DaySpring Villa became the first shelter in Oklahoma to be certified to help adult victims of human sex trafficking.

Serving tirelessly at the shelter for 30 years, Evelyn helped countless victims of domestic violence and physical abuse with practical and Christian spiritual care while providing food, shelter, clothing, and transportation, enabling them to recover and live God-honoring lives. After Evelyn's death, one woman at the shelter Evelyn cared for wrote of her, "This woman showed me the love of Jesus and because of her love for Him, my life will forever be changed... Thank you Miss Evelyn for loving me when I couldn't even love myself!!"

During the last weeks of life, she lived among the guests at DaySpring under hospice care so she could continue to serve to the end as a prayer warrior for the guests.

Although Evelyn experienced many difficult years in her life, she constantly drew upon her strong Christian faith to fulfill her calling in serving those in need and leading many to the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing several of them become servants for the Lord Jesus themselves. Reflecting on her life before her death, Evelyn wrote, "We do not always understand why we experience the many troubles and trials, but it helps us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are able to help someone else along life's highway."

Evelyn Cline passed away on Oct. 10, 2014, at the age of 89, and is buried at Old Mission Cemetery in Wichita, Kan.

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame

John Preston Dane

1916—2013
Inducted 2023

Submitted by Dr. Walter L. Mullican

John Preston (J.P.) Dane was born Nov. 10, 1916, in Denning, Ark., to Preston and Jennie May (Adams) Dane. One of seven children, his sister was the oldest of the children, and J.P. was the oldest of the six brothers. The family moved to Poteau, where his father owned and operated the Dane Coal Mine. The family believes that J.P. worked in his father's coal mine.

J.P. moved to Tulsa and graduated from Central High School. He then attended Tulsa Business College and was employed for four years by the Stanolind Oil & Gas Company of Tulsa. He met and married the love of his life, Mildred Evelyn Austin, in 1939 at Tulsa, Springdale.

In 1940, God called J.P. to the gospel ministry. The Springdale Church ordained him to the gospel ministry in 1941. To prepare for a lifetime of service to the Lord, he and his devoted wife, Mildred, attended Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) in Shawnee from 1941 -1945 during World War II. While at OBU, J.P. was president of the student body, and Mildred was Harvest Queen, the only married couple in the history of OBU to receive these honors.

In 1945 he graduated from OBU, magna cum laude, with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity from Southwestern Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas in 1952; a Master of Theology from Central Seminary, Kansas City, Mo. in 1953; and a Doctor of Theology also from Central Seminary in 1955. His dissertation focused on the history of Oklahoma Indian Baptist mission work.

During his years of faithful service, Dane pastored numerous churches in Oklahoma. While a student at OBU, he was pastor at Mannford, First; Prague, First; and Cromwell, First; both before and after graduation from OBU. He also pastored Wilson, First; Tulsa, Bethel; Pawhuska, First; and Springfield, Mo., Grant Ave.

Dane had accepted the call to the Grant Ave. church and had been on the field for just six months when he received a call from John Wesley Raley, President of OBU. Raley wanted Dane to come to OBU to be chairman of the Bible Department. Dane's reply to him was, "Dr. Raley, they throw stones up here in Missouri."



J.P. Dane

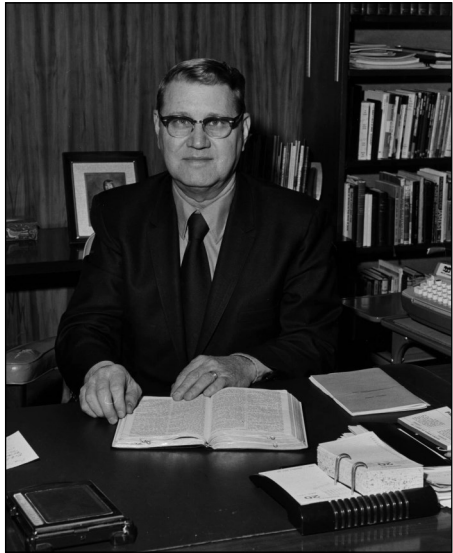
Raley told him they would understand, and they did, and he came to OBU, where he taught and served as Chairman of the Bible Department from 1958-1963. He left the OBU faculty in 1963 to become pastor of Oklahoma City, Portland Avenue, where he served until 1971.

In 1972, Dane accepted the position of Director of Religious Activities and Chairman of the Religion Department at Grand Canyon University (GCU), Phoenix, Ariz., where he served until 1981, when he retired. After retirement, the Danes returned to Oklahoma City, where he served for six years as the associate pastor and minister to senior adults at Portland Avenue. In 1993, Dane was named Pastor Emeritus of Portland Avenue, a role he held until he died in 2013.

Dane was also involved in missions work around the globe. In 1970, Portland Avenue sent Dane to preach a crusade in New Zealand. He also preached in a church in Australia. He was also able to attend the Baptist World Congress in Tokyo. In the 1980s, he served as the Bible Study Leader for the Annual Mission Meeting in Lima, Peru, for 10 days. He also served as Interim Pastor of the International Baptist Church in Stuttgart, Germany, for about six months in 1991.

Denominationally, he served in many roles at associational and state convention levels. In 1969-1970, he served as President of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO) as the first person to serve two consecutive terms. He set a precedent for State Convention Presidents who followed him to the present to serve two successive terms, with the second term being unopposed. Dane served on the Board of Directors for the BGCO two four-year terms on the OBU Board of Directors, BGCO Convention Building Committee, State Christian Education Committee, two terms on the State Historical Commission; Bible Teacher at Falls Creek Baptist Assembly in 1970; First Vice-President of the BGCO in 1967; and chaired the Senior Adult Committee for Capital Association in 1990-1991.

He was a beloved teacher of the Bible. In 1948, when Southern Baptists launched the January Bible Study, Dane began teaching



J.P. Dane preparing a sermon

the Study and did so consecutively for the next 50 years and in many years, he conducted the study at other churches three-to-four times. He also led January Bible Study clinics around the state, equipping other pastors to teach the study. His last year to conduct January Bible Study was 1997, when he was 80; fittingly, he taught it at his beloved Portland Avenue Church.

Dane received numerous awards and honors. In 1992, GCU awarded him their Certificate of Merit. He received two alumni awards from his alma mater, OBU. He received the Profile in Excellence award in 1996 and the Alumni Achievement Award in 1998. When remodeling the chapel at the Portland Avenue Church in 2001, the chapel was renamed the Dane Chapel in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Dane.

One of the lasting legacies and contributions of Dane's long ministry is his influence on many young pastors and staff members who served under him, most notably Bill Green, who served as minister of music at Portland Avenue while Dane was pastor.

I had the privilege of serving as his pastor for 21 years, and his influence, friendship, and wisdom impacted my ministry and life deeply.

J.P. and his devoted, loving wife, Mildred, were married for 70 years until she died in 2010. During their marriage, they followed the "J.O.Y." principle. Jesus, first; others, second; you, last. They are survived by two children, Linda Dane Page of McCloud, and Austin Dane of Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

The coal miner's son from Poteau served the Lord and His church faithfully for some 74 years until he died in 2013. He was always deeply loved by the congregations he served. He was a remarkable teacher of God's Word, and always had a pastor's heart wherever he served.

His contributions and ministry are felt to this day by the churches, denominations, schools, and individuals he served.



J.P. Dane, second from left, with former Oklahoma City, Portland Ave. pastors, from left, Jack Robbins, Bill Kersh and J.A. Pennington.

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame

Willene Pierce

1942—2014

Inducted 2023

by Richard McCullough, Member, Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Willene Pierce was born Nov. 2, 1942 in Belle Plaine, Kan., the daughter of Julian and Wenonah Pierce. As a young girl, Willene came to Oklahoma many times with her grandmother assisting with Vacation Bible Schools (VBS) among Choctaws in southeast Oklahoma. She accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior in 1952 during a revival in a Native American church while vacationing with her grandparents in Oklahoma. At age 12, Willene began playing piano in churches, and at age 17, she returned to Oklahoma to teach in VBS in the Choctaw-Chickasaw Association.

She attended Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1964 and a Master of Religious Education from Southwestern Seminary. Her best friends in college were Native American students. She joined the Indian Club and even joined Sallateeska church, an Indian congregation. During this time, she took a one-year sabbatical. Purchasing a camper to live in, she continued working in Native American churches, including tuning their pianos.

After graduation, she moved to Bartlesville, teaching fifth grade in elementary school for five years and serving as youth director at Bartlesville, Virginia Avenue.

Moving to Little Rock, Ark., she began serving in the State Women's Missionary Union (WMU) office, becoming the Arkansas State Baptist Young Women's director from 1974-1982.

From there, she moved to the eastern United States serving as the Executive Director/Treasurer of the WMU in Maryland/Delaware until 1995. In that position, she was also the Director of Camp Wo-Me-To in northern Harford County near Jarrettsville, Md. After serving the Lord in this capacity, she became Director of the Women's Department of the Baptist World Alliance from 1995-1997.

In 1995-96, Willene conducted a research project funded by WMU's Second Century Fund and study-leave funds from the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware. The study focused on effective ways to provide leadership training for women in the Indian churches and moral and social issues that impact their lives.



Willene Pierce

Although not Native American by blood, Willene certainly felt so in heart and spirit and in early 1998, she returned to Oklahoma with a vision of a "tribe" of Native American women banding together to share the love of Jesus Christ through songs lifted in praise to their Savior in native languages.

In January 1998, she started a ministry called The Native American LINK, Inc. (Living in Neighborly Kindness) based on Luke 10:27, *"Jesus answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.'"* The Native American LINK ministry is a non-profit organization that seeks to help equip Native American women for Christian ministry.

In November 1999, she began the Native Praise Choir, which praises God in English and three languages which represent the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma: Muscogee Creek and Seminole Nations, which speak basically the same language; the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, which have the same basic language; and Cherokee. Choir members also share their faith through drama, art, teachings, education, and mission service. The Native Praise Choir has been instrumental in preserving Indian culture through the Native Christian hymns passed down by ancestors and has accepted invitations to sing in 16 states and in Nikopol, Ukraine and Northwest Territory, Canada. In 2002, the Native Praise Choir sang at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in St. Louis and performed at the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham, England, in 2005.

Part of Willene Pierce's vision for Native Praise Choir was to forge links between and open doors to the Native American tribes, providing a Christian ministry bringing together tribes divided by history. Through the years, Willene Pierce's vision has come to fruition as Native American LINK has done just that, even reaching beyond Oklahoma, bringing native women together on a national level.

Willene retired from her position as Executive Director of LINK, after serving for 15 years, in 2013, but continued to serve as a consultant on the Executive board. In March 2013, Willene Pierce was recognized at the annual session of the Oklahoma Indian Evangelism Conference for her 50 years of service to Native American women through Baptist ministries. In the summer of 2013, Willene was also honored at Indian Falls Creek Baptist Assembly. The National WMU honored Willene by making a contribution to the Native American LINK Endowment in her honor.

During her years of service to her Lord and Savior, Willene went on many mission trips in both the United States and overseas and sometimes took Native American women on trips with her. Willene said she found "making missions contagious" her most desirable task because it involved both immediate and eternal results.

Augusta "Gus" Smith, who succeeded Willene as Executive Director of LINK, said, "To me, personally, and to many, she was our



Augusta Smith, current Native American LINK director, calls Willene Pierce “Our modern-day Annie Armstrong.” (Baptist Messenger Photo)

modern-day Annie Armstrong. She served us tirelessly, helping us to develop skills in serving, ministering, and strengthening our love for Jesus through doing.”

Living in Springdale, Ark., in her later years, Willene passed away suddenly on Tues., March 18, 2014, at Baptist Hospital in Oklahoma City. She is buried at Brannon Mountain Cemetery near Sonora, Ark.

In the years following her death, Native American LINK has continued its original mission started by Willene Pierce focusing primarily on a woman-to-woman approach: linking women from one tribe to another, from one church to another, non-Indian women to Indian women, Indian churches to non-Indian churches, older women to younger women, and those with specific skills to those who want to learn them.

The legacy that Willene Pierce leaves is one of obedience, faithfulness, and service to her Lord and Savior, impacting countless souls for the Kingdom of Christ through numerous areas of Christian ministry, including personal witness training, WMU, consultation, Bible distribution, and coordination of ministry projects at Indian schools, hospitals, and children’s homes. Additional ministries serve prisons, and provide job training, health care, and nutrition, with parenting and encouragement to ministers’ wives.

“One cannot speak of The Native American Living in Neighborly Kindness (LINK) ministry without the name of Willene Pierce entering the conversation, Smith commented. “The vision of this ministry began long ago, when Willene, as a teenage girl, came to Vacation Bible School (VBS) at New Hope Baptist Church, among the Choc-

taw-Chickasaw Association in Oklahoma with her grandmother, Mrs. Guthrie, and missionary Lora Wagner of Sallisaw.

"Willene's love for the people was immediate, and she served numerous times in Native churches. She attended Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), joined a local Native Baptist church, and participated in the Indian Club on the OBU campus. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree from OBU, Willene continued her education, receiving a Master's degree in Religious Education at Southwestern Seminary.

"She faithfully served in Christian ministry through the years, including the Arkansas Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), Maryland/Delaware WMU, and as Women's Director of the Baptist World Alliance. Her servant heart never left the Native American work in Oklahoma. She answered God's call to return to Oklahoma to organize a ministry where Native women could link with one another, tribe to tribe, church to church, non-Native to Native women, and address ways to work together to develop personal skills, strengthen family life and promote spiritual growth.

"Willene Pierce will always have a place of honor among our Native American Baptist work. It has been said that Willene Pierce was our modern-day Annie Armstrong, willing to return to Oklahoma, with the vision of developing and encouraging leaders. She was always ready to teach and work alongside Baptist churches and to focus on the mission efforts of women in the Native churches of the state. It was the decision of The Native American LINK Executive Board that a plaque in Willene's honor lies among those recognizing other honored Christian men and women at the entrance of the Falls Creek Conference Center, R.A. Young Tabernacle, and a seat dedicated to Willene in the tabernacle auditorium.

"With Willene's vision in mind, The Native American LINK has made great strides in accomplishing and advancing the work among Native Americans today. As we have completed 25 years of ministry, the organization has established strong links with tribal nations, while remaining an organization, first, that proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord. Many of our men and women have served in positions of leadership among Oklahoma Baptist entities, serving on state level boards and committees.

"The Native Praise Choir, one of the key ministries that Willene established soon after the organization began, continues to share the love of God through the singing of Christian tribal hymns in tribal languages. The choir has traveled extensively in several states, as well as to Birmingham, England, Ukraine, and Canada. Many of the same women who sing, are women who provide an assortment of ministries, reaching out to the Native and non-Native alike, proclaiming Jesus Christ faithfully.

"Our Native American LINK ministry has an established website, produces a quarterly newsletter, ministered in Ukraine as its first Na-

Willene Pierce

tive American medical missions team, ministered in Northwest Territory, Canada, among First Nations people, and has experienced community opportunities to sing for the city of Oklahoma City Christmas tree lighting, and with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra. It has been our joy to sing for the national WMU five times, which surpasses any other vocal group in history.

“Yes, Willene Pierce’s vision was truly one whom God ordained to exist and flourish. The Native American LINK lives on.”

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame

Rudy Ramirez

1916—2013

Inducted 2023

by Bob Nigh, Historical Secretary/Director of History

In September 1982, Rudy Ramirez joined the staff of Oklahoma City, First's Good Shepherd ministry to serve as pastor of the Spanish-speaking and the Good Shepherd English-speaking groups. He moved from the Spanish Mission at Frederick, First.

A native of Cuero, Texas, Ramirez served as pastor of Templo Bautista, the Spanish Baptist Mission in Frederick, which was sponsored by First Baptist Church, beginning in 1954. In 1973, he resigned at the Spanish Mission and moved to the First Southern Mexican Church in Tucson, Ariz.

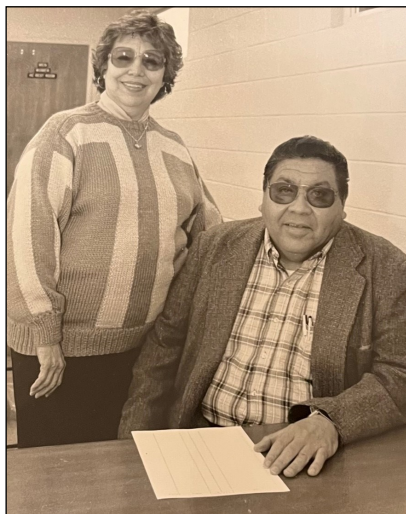
In March 1977, he returned as pastor of the Spanish mission in Frederick, moving from Ingle-side, Texas, where he was pastor of a Spanish-speaking church.

A graduate of the University of Corpus Christi, Texas, he was active in community affairs while serving in Frederick, being an honorary member of both the Rotary Club and Jaycees. He also served as a member of the Tillman County Ministerial Alliance, the Human Rights Commission, the Frederick United Fund and the Oklahoma Commission on Mexican-American Affairs.

Ramirez also was a jointly employed missionary with The Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO) and the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for a total of 17 years. He established preaching points at Davidson, Snyder, and Tipton.

"He drove so many miles in his mission work that the Internal Revenue System called him into question," recalled Robert Haskins, retired BGCO senior associate executive director. "I was called to his defense. He was a real missionary who wanted everyone to hear the Gospel."

When he retired from pastoring, Ramirez moved to Oklahoma



Rudy Ramirez and his wife, Mary.

City and was employed as director of the Good Shepherd Ministry along with his wife Mary. He served there until he became ill and died.

Thousands of people were helped by the Good Shepherd Ministry since its doors opened in 1969 as a light-house for the inner city. Initially, Good Shepherd programs included a food pantry, clothes closet,

worship services, Bible study and youth ministries. Later, the ministry focused on three areas—a medical-dental clinic, food pantry and clothing room.

The food pantry was open from 3-3:30 p.m., daily. In 1991, Good Shepherd provided food for 614 families and 2,213 individuals, and 4,429 people took advantage of the clothing room.

Begun in 1978, the medical clinic served between 1,600 and 1,700 people a year. The clinic initially operated on Monday nights, but also started operating on Thursday nights because so many patients were having to be turned away.

Two doctors donated their time each night to see patients in the clinic's six examining rooms. There also were four dental chairs staffed by dental students from the University of Oklahoma School of Dentistry, who were accompanied to the clinic by a dental professor. Volunteer nurses and pharmacists completed the medical staff.

Good Shepherd moved into a new facility in November 1991, which was dedicated on March 29, 1992. The 6,000-square-foot facility replaced an old multi-story apartment building which was razed as part of an improvement project.

Good Shepherd was funded solely by First Church with a monthly stipend for hunger funds provided by the BGCO cooperative missions department.

The ministry received 30-35 phone calls a day. The calls are answered with "May I help you?" and ended with "God bless you."

"Our purpose," said Ramirez, "is to supply people's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs .



Rudy Ramirez and his wife, Mary, explain the ministries of the Good Shepherd Ministry—the food pantry, medical-dental clinic and clothing room—to those seeking assistance.

(Baptist Messenger File Photo)

RON FANNIN

2023

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

by Bob Nigh, Historical Secretary/Director of History

A night of laughs and reflections occurred Tues., May 20, 2014 at Oklahoma City, Southern Hills, as a large crowd attended a dinner honoring Ron Fannin, senior associate executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO), who was retiring at the end of July.

BGCO board members, former and current BGCO co-workers; representatives of affiliated ministries; former co-workers of The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma (BFO), where Fannin served for 12 years; former pastors of churches where Fannin served, as well as family and friends met to honor Fannin as he neared retirement.



Ron Fannin

Robert Haskins, retired BGCO senior associate executive director, served as the emcee of the evening's program, introducing the speakers and presenters, including Ron's brother, Alton Fannin, pastor of Ardmore, First.

"Ron has been a leader who has lifted hundreds if not thousands of other people to greater assignments of accomplishments in life, never expecting any reward for himself. I'm actually a recipient of that influence," said Alton.

Fannin served on staff at three state churches including Drumright, First; Oklahoma City, Knob Hill; and Lawton, Central.

Brad Allen, who pastored at Lawton, Central when Fannin served there, said the church baptized 1,011 people during the nine years Allen and Fannin were on staff.

"I was a pastor for 40 years. Ron Fannin is the best staff member I have ever worked with," said Allen.

Bob Ross pastored at Drumright, First and Oklahoma City, Knob Hill at the time of Fannin's service at both churches. He also was president of the Baptist Foundation and hired Fannin as senior vice president in charge of the Foundation's loan services. At the dinner, Ross spoke highly of Fannin's work with the Foundation, saying not one loan was lost during Fannin's service.

"It was more than a job to him; it was a ministry," said Ross. "Ron Fannin, indeed, is my very dear friend. Next to my wife and family he is probably the best friend I have in all this world. I have never known a person (who) more personifies the spirit of Christ in humility



Fannin participates in the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma's first-ever conference call board meeting on Jan. 28, 2000. The unusual gathering was precipitated by a massive snow storm that hit the state.

and service to others than you, Ron. My life is richer today because your life touched mine.”

Born July 4, 1948, to Hobart and Catherine Fannin in Chandler. He grew up in Wynnewood, and resided in Chico, Texas before moved to Marietta, where he graduated from high school in 1966.

He graduated from Murray State College in Tishomingo in 1968 and from Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) with a degree in Church Music in 1971. He accepted the call to gospel ministry at age 16 and was ordained in 1970 at Drumright, First.

In addition to his ministry in music, education, youth and administration at churches, Fannin served the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma as vice president for church building loans and student services and senior vice president from 1988-2000. In the latter role, he oversaw a \$30 million church building loan portfolio, traveling more than 40,000 miles a year assisting Oklahoma churches in evaluating building projects and creating a safe debt service to allow them to maintain their current ministry and keep their missions giving strong.

He also served as BGCO as Senior Associate Executive Director from September 2000-July 2014.

Over the Labor Day weekend in September 2005, Fannin helped to coordinate the BGCO's massive statewide response to begin housing up to 3,000 victims of Hurricane Katrina at Falls Creek Baptist Conference Center. The Baptist Building staff spent the weekend on the phone contacting cabin owners, getting their permission to use their cabins for housing. They also mailed hundreds of letters to

Falls Creek donors explaining what was happening. Although the misplaced Katrina victims never eventually occupied the campground, state Baptists showed their mettle in preparing a huge undertaking.

After “retirement,” he has served with the BFO as Trust/Probate Property Manager and Fleet Manager for vehicle purchases, and with Oklahoma Baptists, Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children and Baptist Village Retirement Communities as Fleet Manager for vehicle purchases, repairs and insurance claims.

Fannin has served in 26 interim music positions during his 26 years in the Baptist Building. Nationally, he has served on the Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.



Ron and Jamie Fannin take a “test drive in a used car.” Ron is known for being the fleet manager for the BFO and other state affiliates, as well as helping individuals buy and sell vehicles.

In 2013 he was a recipient of the OBU Alumni Association's Profile In Excellence Award.

Fannin has been a member of the Singing Churchmen of Oklahoma since 1971 and served as president of the group in 1982. He was the recipient of the Churchmen's Royce Brown Award for Lifetime achievement in Music Ministry in 2014.

He traveled with the Churchmen on mission trips to Russia (2), China, Australia and Armenia. He also has traveled to the Holy Land on three occasions.

Married to the former Jamie Pace of Tishomingo since 1968 the couple have three married children: Melanie Nippert, Todd Fannin, and Greg Fannin; 10 grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

“I gave my heart to the Lord Jesus Christ at age 13 at, Chico, Texas, First and surrendered my life to Christian ministry in music at age 16,” he said. “I love and appreciate my association with Oklahoma Baptist churches through church loans, opportunities to share my faith, lead in worship services and connect with each of them through the Cooperative Program of mission giving.

“I am most grateful for the mentorship of Bob Ross, my pastor and President of the Baptist Foundation, and Dr. Anthony Jordan, who allowed me to minister with him at the BGCO.”

2022 GASKIN BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY AWARD

Church History Award goes to Stilwell, First

The 125th Anniversary history of Stilwell, First was judged by a committee of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission to be the best among those submitted in 2022, and has been awarded the Gaskin Baptist Church History Award.

"It's hard to imagine a church existing for 125 years, unless it was established and sustained by God," said Pastor Scott Latta. "There have been many people come to know the Lord through the outreach of the church, many edified by its great preaching and teaching, and many who have gone home with rewards laid up in Heaven."

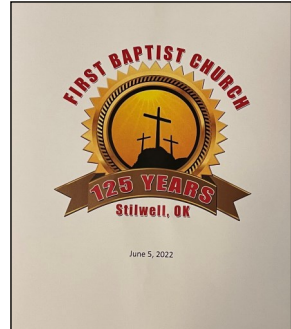
The church history points out that on May 22, 1897, by request of the Baptist people of Stilwell, Indian Territory, a meeting was held for the purpose of organizing a Baptist church. It was started by the members of Zion Baptist Church. The elders were J.C. Brendel, appointed moderator, W.E. Billingsley, appointed clerk, and J.L. Sellers. Brendel also was elected pastor.

A lot on the corner of Third and Oak streets was given by the Johnson family for the first church building, a small frame structure. In 1898, the church applied to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB) for funds to build a more substantial frame building. A baptistry was built under the pulpit in 1918.

In 1927, another wooden tabernacle was built for extra space and was used until 1929. At that time, a stone building was planned, but sufficient funds were available only for a basement, which was started in 1928, and was used for all services except baptism.

In 1941, \$3,500 was borrowed from the HMB to construct a building which was dedicated in October 1944. In 1958, an education annex was added to the church facility and used until the present church on West Hickory was built.

The church has had many outreach programs, including a Christian Academy, a ministry to children pre-school through high school from 1978-1992; a bus ministry started in 1976; and a Bible conference begun in 1995, lasting for 22 years. Current ministries include feeding Nicaraguan pastors; Operation Christmas Child; "Women Becoming" conference; AWANA; a food pantry; jail ministry; Feed my Sheep ministry and Vacation Bible School and summer camps.



Memorial Gifts

On Sept. 8, 1998 by vote of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission, a memorial fund was established whereby a gift of \$25 or more may be made to the Gaskin Historical Archives and Library Forever Fund in memory of a deceased relative or friend. The following list includes those gifts in alphabetical order for those honored.

Del Allen, Wilburton

Given by Sans Bois Association

Ramona Allen, Wilburton

Given by John and Pat Hart

Ramona Allen, Wilburton

Given by Delmer, Charity and Tim Allen

Donald E. Badgett, Del City

Given by Winfred T. and Grace L., Knight, Jr.

James Ball, Claremore

Given by Lemuel Ball

Margie Ball, Claremore

Given by Lemuel Ball

Bob Burrows, Amarillo, Texas

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

Pluma Cantrell, Sallisaw

Given by Del and Ramona Allen

Rose Chronister, Sallisaw

Given by Sans Bois Baptist Association

E. Farrell Dixon, Tulsa

Given by Curtis and Betty Dixon

Memorial Gifts

Donald R. Dunn, Chickasha

Given by Jimmie L. Dunn

Jack Everhart, Oklahoma City

Given by Del and the late Ramona Allen

Betty Farris, Muskogee

Given by Del and Ramona Allen

J. C. Folk, Midwest City

Given by Winfred T. and Grace L. Knight, Jr.

Virginia Ann Fry, Claremore

Given by Lemuel Ball

Helen Isom Gaskin, Durant

Given by Patricia Roberts

Jesse Marvin (J.M.) Gaskin, Durant

Given by Delmer Allen

Joseph Alexander Gaskin, Cartersville

Given by J. M. Gaskin

Jim Glaze, Montgomery, Ala.

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

George Hill, Coalgate

Given by Margaret Hill

George Hill, Coalgate

Given by J. M. Gaskin

Mrs. Carrell Hooper, Durant

Given by J.M. and Helen Gaskin

Carleen Jones, Oklahoma City

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

Memorial Gifts

Norma Jordan, Bartlesville

Given by the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Nadean Justice, Oklahoma City

Given by J. M. Gaskin

Thelma Juanita King, Del City

Given by Winfred T. and Grace L. Knight, Jr.

Murray Leath, Plano, Texas

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

Dick Lovelady, Bethany

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

Clara Luedecke, Weatherford, Texas

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

Burl Mackey, Edmond

Given by Jonell Crawford

Carl Mackey, Kingfisher

Given by Jonell Crawford

Charles Mackey, Durant

Given by Mrs. Robert Mackey

Robert Mackey, Durant

Given by Mrs. Robert Mackey

Bob Maxwell, Stigler

Given by Del Allen

Lee McWilliams, Durant

Given by Patricia Roberts

Maye McWilliams, Durant

Given by Patricia Roberts

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Emma L. Shoemate Morton, Durant

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Barbara Peaden, Oklahoma City

Given by Winfred T. and Grace L. Knight, Jr.

Wenonah Willene Pierce, Fayetteville, Ark.

Given by Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Wenonah Willene Pierce, Fayetteville, Ark.

Given by Del and Ramona Allen

Marie Ratliff, Wilburton

Given by Center Point Baptist Church

John D. Riggs, Durant

Given by J.M. Gaskin

Todd H. Sheldon, Dallas, Texas

Given by the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission

Todd H. Sheldon, Dallas, Texas

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John L. Smith, Marlow

Given by Winfred Knight

Cathy Spain, Midwest City

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Max Stanfield, Oklahoma City

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William G. Tanner, Belton, Texas

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James Timberlake, Atlanta, Ga.

Given by Kathryn Timberlake

Thelma Townsend, Oklahoma City

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

Lawrence Van Horn, Oklahoma City

Given by Marlin and Patsy Hawkins

H. Alton Webb, Anadarko

Given by J.M. and Helen Gaskin

Almeda Welch, Durant

Given by J.M. and Helen Gaskin

Hazel Marie Williams White, Wilburton

Given by Del and Ramona Allen

PUBLICATION POLICY

Digital issues of the *Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle* have been posted to the Oklahoma Baptists' web site. Printed copies of the *Chronicle* as far back to the late 1950s also are available for purchase at a cost of \$2 each. Send orders to the Historical Secretary, Baptist Building, 3800 N. May Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73112-6506.

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