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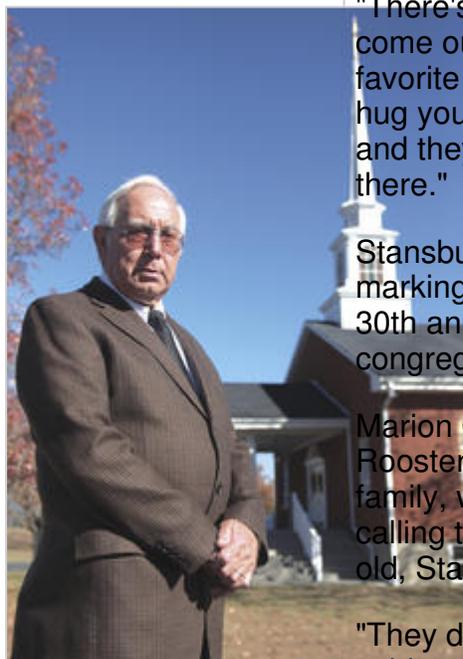
Keeping the Faith

Pastor will celebrate 30 years at Muldraugh Hill this weekend

By Stephen Lega

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The Rev. Vic Stansbury, better known as "Brother Vic", has a lot of treasured memories from his years in the ministry, but his favorites are in the small moments.



Stephen Lega

Pictured is Bro. Vic Stansbury, pastor at Muldraugh Hill Baptist Church.

"There's a world of those moments. Sunday mornings as people come out and give you a hug or a handshake, all of those are favorite moments," he said. "Little children that will come out and hug you. You watch 'em grow from little children up to teenagers, and they still come out and hug you. A lot of good memories there."

Stansbury, 65, has been in the ministry for 44 years, but he will be marking another milestone this weekend. Sunday will mark his 30th anniversary at Muldraugh Hill Baptist Church, the congregation he considers like family.

Marion County reminds Stansbury of where he grew up near Rooster Run in Nelson County. The community, and even his family, was a blend of different denominations. In some ways, his calling to ministry has been familiar from an early age. At 2 years old, Stansbury was hospitalized for 35 days with lockjaw.

"They didn't expect me to live. Very few people did live with it," he said.

But Stansbury survived, and that convinced him that his life had a higher purpose.

"My parents always told me I wouldn't be alive today if it wasn't for the church praying for me," he said. "I realized that God gave me back my life, and he had a purpose for me."

Stansbury was the youngest of six children. He said they grew up poor. He doesn't recall them having a car when he was young, but they lived across the street from New Salem Baptist Church. As a result, it was their home church, and it also meant he had plenty of chances to get to know the pastors.

"We were always over at the preacher's house bothering him as kids," Stansbury said.

He was baptized at age 9 in an old rock quarry by Roy Lee Honeycutt, who would later go on to become the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

Another pastor, Brooks Faulkner, later asked Stansbury if he'd even considered going into the ministry. Stansbury said that he had, and at age 16, he preached for the first time at his home church.

"I worked all week on the Good Samaritan. I thought, man, this is going to be a long, long sermon. I did it on Wednesday night. My mother was about five minutes late, and she got there as I was closing out," he said with a laugh. "It didn't last as long as I thought it was going to."

Nevertheless, Stansbury continued to preach during his high school years, sometimes filling in when a pastor was out of town. Meanwhile, his father was fighting cancer, and one month after Stansbury graduated from high school, his father died at the age of 52.

Stansbury said his father could not read or write, but because of that, he'd always stressed the importance of education to his children. Knowing his family situation, his high school counselor encouraged Stansbury to look at Berea College, a tuition-free institution where students work in exchange for their education.

While he was still a student at Berea, Stansbury took two big steps. He married his wife, Joan Kay Call, and at the age of 21, he became the pastor of his first church, Galilee Baptist, which was near Berea.

"It was a little mountain church," he said.

At Galilee, he and his wife started the church's first vacation Bible school. The church grew from 25 members to around 40 members by the time he left to further his education at Southern Seminary.

While in Louisville, he worked at G.E. at night to pay for his education. He and his wife had their first child, and he took on another church, Lockport Baptist in Henry County.

After four years in the seminary, Stansbury completed his Master's of Divinity.

"It's supposed to be a three-year program. I often laughed and said I stuffed it into four years," he said.

He then went on to pastor Sligo Baptist Church, which has a unique geographic location.

"They claim that the cemetery is in Trimble County, the preacher preached from Oldham County and the people sat in Henry County," Stansbury said.

After his time at Sligo, he went on to Elk Creek Baptist, his final stop before he was called to Muldraugh Hill.

While he was at Elk Creek, J.W. Farmer had preached a revival there. Farmer was originally a member of Muldraugh Hill, and when the church started to search for a new pastor in 1980, Farmer's nephew was on the pulpit committee. Farmer passed along Stansbury's name.

When he was initially contacted, Stansbury agreed to an interview, and he agreed to preach a trial sermon at Muldraugh Hill, although he wasn't inclined to leave Elk Creek, at least not at first.

"I preached my trial sermon, and I only had three votes against me, which was pretty overwhelming with the size of the congregation," Stansbury said. "I felt like the Lord was telling me through all of that that I should come."

His wife was supportive of whatever decision he made.

"She more or less put it in my hands," he said.

He said he spent several days squirrel hunting as he was trying to decide. When all was said and done, the Stansburys moved to Marion County, although even then, he only thought he would be here three or four years, like most pastors.

"But I look up 30 years later, I'm still here," he said.

Stansbury credits his wife for much of the success he has enjoyed in his ministry. He admits that he's not good at organizing things, such as vacation Bible schools or the annual hanging of the greens, but his wife has been mainstay in getting things done.

"She's a great pastor's wife," Stansbury said. "I kid 'em here. I say if something happened to her, they'd ask me to leave in two weeks."

In the past 30 years, Stansbury has had invitations from other churches (including twice from the same church), but each time he has felt the Lord was calling him to stay at Muldraugh Hill.

"The feeling was that the Lord wasn't through with me here yet," Stansbury said. "I was here 18 years before we built onto the church."

That addition is the fellowship hall at the back of the church, and the church was able to pay it off within five years. Today, it hosts Sunday school classes and social events, such as wedding receptions.

Stansbury describes Muldraugh Hill as an open and loving church, and he thinks of his members like family. While the church serves as his home, he sees his ministry as reaching out into the community. And he considers the people he's met one of the most gratifying parts of his career.

"The most rewarding part is getting to know people, not only in your church, but in your community. I love my people, that's all I can say ... It's going to be tough when the day of retirement comes," he said.

One of the ways Stansbury has tried to reach out is by visiting people in the hospital, regardless of whether they are members of his church or somewhere else. As another part of that outreach, he's officiated at funerals for people from throughout the community, including people he's never met.

"Every person is important in God's sight and deserves to have some kind of funeral. I've always felt that way," he said.

Throughout his ministry, Stansbury has overseen more than 500 funerals and more than 300 weddings. One of the highlights of his career is that he's been able to officiate one couple's wedding and later officiate at the weddings of those couple's children.

He's also seen multiple generations grow up during his time at Muldraugh Hill, which he said is something many pastors don't get to do.

He was recently asked his favorite verse, and he responded with John 3:16.

"It entails the whole Gospel in one verse if you want to look at it that way," he said. "'For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son, that whoever shall believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.'"

And his favorite hymn?

"Probably the Old Rugged Cross. I date myself because I'm not into the modern music," he said, laughing.

But this Sunday, he'll be looking forward to more of his favorite memories, with handshakes and hugs from the nearly 200 people who attend the weekly services.

"The church here has been a great church. They've loved me and cared for me. That means a lot. It really does," he said. "And I love them."