

“Preacher”

I first heard of “Preacher” Hughes when I was about to graduate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 1975. The telephone rang in our little one bedroom apartment in Ft. Worth, Texas one night about 8:30 pm. Central Standard Time. At about 10:00 pm, I finally hung up the phone and Connie, my wife, asked who was that on the phone. I felt like I had been talking to my good friend and I had never even heard his voice or knew him in any way before that call. I told her it was the pastor of a church in Chesapeake, Virginia.

No, he had not offered a job or even an invitation to visit the church or even a meeting with the search committee, but I could tell from our conversation that we were a pretty good fit. He was a graduate of Southwestern and lived in Virginia, my home state and we discussed much more than the South Norfolk Baptist Church’s need for a Minister of Education.

“Preacher” could talk baseball, basketball, hunting, family, local Virginia news and much more. He was a man who loved people, I could tell that immediately. He and I talked about everything that night. He finally said, “Well, I guess you’d better be getting to bed. I’ll be back in touch soon. Hope you have fun!” we signed off and the next thing I know there was another call from him and then from the chairman of the search committee at South Norfolk Baptist Church.

About the middle of November 1975, Connie and I were on a Delta flight from DFW into Atlanta and then on to Norfolk. It was a good weekend, with all the stuff that comes with a search committee, looking at the community, seeing the church at worship, etc. Connie and I headed back to Ft. Worth with some mixed emotions. Connie was not particularly enamored with the community, but it was ok. I must admit it wasn’t top on my list, but I liked “Preacher” enough to tell him that if the committee wanted us, we’d continue to talk.

The week before Thanksgiving 1975, we accepted the call of the South Norfolk Baptist Church of Chesapeake, Virginia to become their Minister of Education and Youth. We moved to Chesapeake after graduation in December and began ministering with “Preacher” on December 1976.

“Preacher” was something to work with, I can tell you that. He would give you the freedom to do what was needed to be done. He would suggest things, but it was up to you as to the how and when and what. Since this was my first church out of seminary it was interesting at times, but he supported me through it all. After a short time, the church needed a part-time Music director and I was asked to assume those duties as well. “Preacher” knew that I had an associate degree in music from Bluefield College. His son, Joe had attended Bluefield, I believe, a few days before me. So, with his encouragement and blessing we set out to be Minister of Education, Music and Youth. For the next 3 years we worked in worship and education together.

When our first child, Elizabeth was born in 1977, he was overjoyed. I cannot tell you how that made us feel. He was more proud of her and almost anyone. He was proud! A big hug was always ready for Connie and Elizabeth, no matter where we were.

I could go on for several more pages, but I'll spare you the time. "Preacher" was the first Pastor that I worked with in a local church. He was and will always be a hero to me. I learned more in the three and one half years that I served with him than in any other time in my ministry. Even after I went to another church to serve we were still great friends. We always saw each other at denominational meeting and visits when my family was on vacation in the area. I was even invited back to sing a time or two and to be at his retirement.

Thank You, "Preacher" for believing in me. I will never forget this man, this good man, "Preacher" Hughes!