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## **NEWS RELEASE**

April 23, 2008  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **DECADES OF SERVICE AT PROVIDENCE BAPTIST CHURCH**

#### *Church Ministers Celebrate 25 and 35 Year Anniversaries*

BEAUREGARD — The wrinkles on their faces are testaments to the good and bad times in their lives. They speak softly as their eyes stare off into space, summoning stories of the ministry they have shared. And they both grin when asked what has kept them at the 150-year-old Providence Baptist Church.

Church ministers Dr. Rusty J. Sowell, pastor, and Dr. Thomas R. Smith, music minister, will celebrate their decades of service to Providence Sunday, April 26 at the 10 a.m. church service. According to church records, the two are among the longest serving ministers in Providence history.

Sowell, 53, has served the Beauregard church for 25 years, and Smith, 65, has been the music minister there for 10 years longer. These anniversaries follow the church's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Both men have served in the church's current building, and plan to be with the church as it opens its new fellowship hall within the next month.

From inside his book and manuscript filled office, Sowell explained that there are no

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guidelines on lengths of service in the Baptist church.

“My favorite part is the relationships with people,” Smith said, as if reminiscing on days past.

The music minister recalled the relationships he developed through directing church choirs, leading worship and working on projects. Having secured 35 years at Providence, Smith said that there are countless relationships he had made with members and the community.

The love of fellowship is shared between the music minister and pastor. Sowell said that he enjoys the relationships and sense of community in the church. Sowell is particularly known at the church for enjoying church luncheons and often jokes about it.

“I like the table fellowship,” the pastor said. “It’s not just the food, but the camaraderie.”

The pastor makes a point to say that he does not eat turnips or collards.

“I don’t eat anything a hog will fight you over,” Sowell said with a chuckle.

Both Sowell and Smith agree that the fellowship and the relationships at Providence influence their involvement. The two ministers also gave credit to God.

“It’s a calling,” Sowell said. “When the Lord leads differently, you move in that direction.”

Sowell said that unless God calls him elsewhere, he will stay with Providence. Smith said that he has stayed to follow God’s plan for his life.

“The leadership of the Lord is a wonderful thing,” the music minister said.

At a young age, Smith said he felt called to the music ministry. After holding a few other music minister positions, he came to Providence. It may come as no surprise that his favorite

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hymn is *Wherever He Leads I'll Go*.

Smith said that he remains called to Providence, and that his ministry is still fresh and exciting.

“I feel like the Lord is not through with me at Providence,” Smith said.

Prior to ministering at Providence, Sowell had been pastor of two other churches. Sowell smiled as he talked about how remaining at Providence had provided stability for him and his family.

“In any relationship there is a certain level of commitment,” Sowell said.

The pastor said that he desired to remain committed to the church and the community that he has grown to love. Providence has allowed him to do that.

“It is nice for people to have a minister that they can call on at any time,” Sowell said.

The two ministers work closely together to prepare worship services and other church events. Sowell said that if he did not have such a close working relationship with the music minister, his job would be very difficult.

“I just can't imagine, nor do I want to consider, ministry without Dr. Tom,” Sowell said.

The pastor said he credits God for his ministry, citing John 3:30 in the bible, “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

“Any positives of my ministry can be credited to my wife and children,” Sowell said with a smile. “If there is anything negative, well, that's just me.”

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