

SCW

Pastor responds to phone request

Installation ceremony
welcomes him to SCW

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

Pastor Larry Baker was minding his own business and his own flock over at the First Baptist Church of Pineville, La. four months ago when he received a fateful long-distance phone call.

On the other end was Morris Wall, head of the Pastor Search Committee of the First Baptist Church of Sun City West.

Wall wanted to know if Baker was interested in trading the bayou for the desert.

He was, and he did — Baker and his family stepped off the plane on Wednesday of last week, and he will be formally installed as the new pastor at the 400 member church at 3 p.m. Sunday.

"It came out of the blue," Baker said.

Baker actually preached to his new congregation for the first time last Sunday, taking advantage of an op-

portunity to "practice on 'em a little bit" in his easygoing drawl.

Arizona was something he hadn't planned on, and the call from out west came as quite a surprise. But Baptists work in mysterious ways.

"Someone gave them my number," Baker said, slightly nonplussed.

Baptist churches generally don't rely on a strict hierarchy and formal policy when appointing clergy — pastors aren't appointed by bishops or anything like that. Wall said pastors are placed via an "informal network" within the church, so when Pastor Owen Dahlor retired from his post in Sun City West in October 1996, there was no big holy official mechanism with which to replace him.

Wall and his committee simply started asking around.

"We called friends around the country," he said.

Wall contacted an acquaintance at Hardin-Simmons University, a private and mostly Baptist college in Abilene, Texas, who suggested a colleague in Louisiana — Dr. Larry Baker.

This was no sleepy little pastorate, either. Baker has an extensive and

impressive academic and community service record. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in theology from East Texas Baptist College, and a doctorate in theology from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He has served professorial and dean of faculty positions at several Baptist seminaries and other higher learning institutions, has been listed in Who's Who In Religion and Men Of Achievement, served on the United Way board of directors, and has an entire study full of awards and honors. He is also a nationally recognized speaker and newspaper columnist.

He has pastored for more than 40 years in Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas, and had been in Pineville for nine years when his latest calling called.

Wall said he and his fellow church members "feel extremely fortunate" in welcoming Baker to their church.

At Sunday's installation celebration and reception, all church members and friends are invited to help introduce Baker and his wife, Wanda, to their new community.

"We're excited about it," Baker said. "It's an adventure."

First Baptist, Sun City West