"Sure, at 84 you're going to have plenty of problems. But I feel I haven't been warned yet by the Lord that my time is up."

BISHOP ISAAC JENKINS SR.

Here to stay

STAFF PHOTOS BY JON BLEIWEIS

Bishop Isaac Jenkins Sr. of Macedonia Baptist Church in Pocomoke City sits in the choir room of his church. Growing up in Portsmouth, Virginia, he was the only one of S.M. Jenkins' seven children who wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a pastor.

Isaac Jenkins Sr. was called to pastor at Macedonia Baptist in Pocomoke in 1960. Fifty-five years later, he's still there

JON BLEIWEIS
STAFF WRITER

Isaac Jenkins Sr. didn't want to simply preach. He wanted to pastor.

He wanted a flock of people he could call his own, and he wanted the chance to meet people not just in Maryland, but in all the land.

Growing up in Portsmouth, Virginia, he was the only one of S.M. Jenkins' seven children who wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a pastor. Where S.M. Jenkins went to preach, so would his son.

He remembers watching his father preach on street corners, standing by his side. And when he finished, he would take his father's hat and go from porch to porch to collect money.

The first step in attaining that goal was to become a pastor.

When the pastor resigned at Macedonia Baptist Church in Pocomoke City, a pastor and friend of Jenkins' father, the Rev. James Mark Douglas, suggested to the church's officers they give Isaac a chance.

After being invited to preach for the first time, they invited him to do so again four more times. He was getting restless and wanted resolution. After the fifth preaching, the officers talked with him and offered the pastor position.

"That was the best thing I heard in I

See JENKINS, Page 2A

Bishop Isaac Jenkins Sr. of Macedonia Baptist Church in Pocomoke City stands outside his church. He's been preaching at the church for 55 years.

IF YOU GO

BISHOP ISAAC JENKINS SR. 55TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

When: 3 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26
Where: Pocomoke Community Center, 1410 Market St., Pocomoke City
Call: 443-235-9727

COVERSTORY

STAFF PHOTO BY JON BLEIWEIS

Bishop Isaac Jenkins Sr. of Macedonia Baptist Church in Pocomoke City sits in his office. The community celebrates 55 years of his preaching in Pocomoke on Sept. 26.

Jenkins

Continued from Page 1A

don't know when," he said. "They called me as pastor on that Sunday, the first Sunday of October 1960."

Once named pastor, he thought he would stay three or four years, with the hope of being called to a larger congregation.

"It didn't turn out that way because of the way people treated me and my family," he said about the kindness of the Pocomoke community. "It seemed to me the thoughts left me about moving somewhere else."

Fifty-five years later, he's still there.

"Baptist preachers do stay long," said Shelia Nelson, the church's clerk and corresponding secretary. "But 55 years? It just wasn't anything we would've thought about."

Over the years, the congregation rose from fewer than 100 when he started to as many as 400 members. There are currently about 300, he said.

Winnette Dennis, a parishioner at the church for 65 years, remembers when Jenkins started. To this day, she finds him to be humble, understanding and patient, just like when he started.

"He preaches the Word and he lives by it," she said.

Bunacee Cooks, a member of the church for 52 years, described him as reliable. From feeding the hungry to helping troubled youths, she and the rest of the community know he is dependable.

"Any time you need someone to talk to, he's always there," she said. "He'll never turn you down."

When the church built a new building in 1990, that's when Jenkins knew he was here to stay.

"I felt they had this much confidence in me ... I was in it for the long haul," he said.

Now 84, Bishop Jenkins continues to deliver weekly sermons while running his Save the Youth crime prevention program during the week, which he started in 1980.

The Lord told him he needed to work beyond the pulpit and go out to where crimes were being committed and help troubled youths, he said.

"I felt if I'm going to be a pastor, it was not enough to just to preach to the good people and let the others go astray and forget them," he said. "No, no, no. I'm going to lay aside some of my pleasure and get out there where they are."

At night and on Saturdays, he'll prepare for his Sunday routine. He asks the Lord to give him a message his congregation needs to hear. Then he gets his Bible and studies chapter after chapter.

"The one that lays on me the hardest, that's the one I turn to, then tell the Lord to give me the strength to preach," he said.

It's a routine he'll continue until he can't any longer.

"Sure, at 84 you're going to have plenty of problems," he said. "But I feel I haven't been warned yet by the Lord that my time is up."

The congregation is setting up a 55th anniversary celebration for Jenkins at the Pocomoke Community Center on Saturday, Sept. 26. It's something he never thought would happen and he doesn't ask for the recognition.

But his congregation wants to thank him.

"I think the greatest thing that happened to the people of Pocomoke who went to Macedonia was to get a man of valor and a man of humility," Nelson said. "We got all of this packaged into one fine young man when he came. It has just continued throughout the 55 years he has been pastor."

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