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Local pastor remembers Jerry Falwell as sincere, strong in faith

By KEN BLACK

The Rev. Jerry Falwell sits in his office on the campus of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va. On Tuesday, the 73-year-old Falwell was discovered without a pulse in his office at Liberty and pronounced dead at a hospital about an hour later. Dr. Carl Moore, Falwell's physician, said he had a heart condition and presumably died of a heart rhythm abnormality.



When Rev. Randy Mason first heard of the death of the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the first thing he and his wife Maureen did was pull out their wedding album.

“[It was] something I hadn’t done in almost 20 years,” he said. “We went through it page by page.”

Tears came to his eyes as he thought back to the day earlier this week.

While it may seem an unusual reaction to have upon hearing about the death of someone, Falwell had a special place in the hearts of the Central Iowa couple. He was the minister who performed

television.

“One thing about Jerry Falwell is he’ll tell you what he thinks. He lives exactly what he thinks,” Mason said. “He is one of the most sincere people I’ve ever met in my life. There’s nothing phony about the man – nothing phony at all.”

Of all the characteristics Mason wants to take with him, it was Falwell’s faith in God to provide that stands out. Sometimes that can mean going out on a limb.

Recently, the church was trying to decide how it would purchase land to build a new building – without going into debt. The church had a bank account balance of \$12,000 and also knew of a need in Nicaragua for churches to be built.

“We voted to wipe out our bank account and take everything we had to send down there to Nicaragua to build a church,” Mason said.

The next week, the church had a record offering. Just recently, they closed the land deal for the new church location without going into debt.

“There’s probably been no other man that’s influenced me more than Dr. Falwell,” Mason said. “He’s taught me what it’s meant to walk by faith.”

When the new church is built, Mason noted it will be a bittersweet time. It was Falwell, himself, who had promised to come to Marshalltown and dedicate the building, according to the pastor.

“He always felt a connection with Marshalltown,” Mason said. “He said that he probably wouldn’t have even been in the ministry if it weren’t for Marshalltown.”

Mason recounted the story of what that was.

In the early 1900s, Billy Sunday, the traveling evangelist, held an event in Marshalltown. In the audience was Fred Donnelson, who became a Christian that night.

Donnelson later became a missionary to China, but had a son. That son went on to pastor a church in Lynchburg, Va. It was Donnelson’s son who was preaching at that church the night that Falwell and some of his friends, on a whim, decided to attend.

That night Falwell accepted Christ and eventually went on to Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Mo.

The rest, as they say is history.

He went on to start Thomas Road Baptist Church, which has grown to 22,000 members. He was also founder of the Moral Majority, a movement largely credited with mobilizing the religious right as a force in American politics.

Falwell was not always a proponent of pastors getting involved in politics, but Mason said the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion weighed heavily on him to take action.

“Ultimately, he came to think, ‘I’m a citizen just as much as my neighbor across the street is. I can voice my opinion just like anyone else’” Mason said. “So he began to believe he had every right and a responsibility to share his viewpoints.”

Mason has thought often of that meeting he had with Falwell in 2005, where he had promised to come to Marshalltown.

“Obviously, that’s not going to happen now but those words will always be there to inspire me,” he said. “He was just a man. We don’t glorify man. But we honor him for his life, the stands he took and his character.”

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