

McNair's successor

Veteran pastor tapped for post

03/30/01 - BRETT J. BLACKLEDGE , News staff writer

The Rev. Steve Small Jr., appointed Thursday to Chris McNair's Jefferson County Commission seat, will represent a district he has lived in for less than three months.

Small, pastor of True Life Baptist Church in Forestdale, owns a home in Smithfield Estates, a subdivision in Commissioner Jeff Germany's district. Small said he and his wife moved from that home in January to Southside Station Apartments on 19th Street South in Birmingham, which is in McNair's district.

Small said the Southside apartment is now his permanent address.

Gov. Don Siegelman said he appointed Small to succeed McNair because he has been impressed with his commitment to children's issues. Siegelman said he was not aware that Small had only recently moved into McNair's district.

"I hope and trust and believe that that's his new permanent residence," Siegelman said.

Siegelman said he has known Small for several years. Small was one of the few pastors in central Alabama to offer at least lukewarm support for the governor's failed lottery initiative. He told his church members in 1999 to vote their conscience, while other ministers preached passionately against the plan.

Small said he personally is against gambling, but endorsed the idea of using proceeds to help education.

A 54-year-old Wilcox County native, Small has been a pastor in the Birmingham area for more than 24 years. He started True Life Baptist Church in Forestdale about 17 years ago.

Prior to that, he was pastor of Lively Hope Baptist Church. While there, Small became entangled in a fight with some of the congregation, including several members who accused him of mishandling church money.

The fight spilled over into a court battle and a judge found there was no evidence of misappropriation of money. In 1980, church members split evenly over whether to get rid of Small.

Small said Thursday he did not want to discuss the Lively Hope controversy. "A lot of people have gone on with their lives since then," he said.

Small's True Life Baptist was the one of the first predominantly black churches in the area to affiliate with the Southern Baptists.

He is co-chair of the Birmingham Inter faith Disaster Recovery Group, formed after the 1998 tornado that killed 34 people in western Jefferson County. The group helps victims recover from storm damage.

After his brief swearing-in ceremony Thursday, Small said he looked forward to serving McNair's district, overseeing the county's \$1.97 billion sewer rehabilitation program and working with commissioners.

"They have a reputation for getting things done without keeping up a whole lot of noise. I want to continue that reputation," he said. "I promise to give it all I've got."

He will serve the remainder of McNair's term, which expires in November 2002.

News staff writer Vickii Howell contributed to this story. © [The Birmingham News](#). Used with permission.