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Master craftsman

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Master craftsman *Chapel's candle staffs are Jack Parham's work of art*

Soon after university chaplain Jim Pitts met Jack Parham '55, a retired physician living in Greenwood, S.C., he asked him an unusual favor.

Although the chaplain had just become acquainted with Parham through a mutual friend, he knew of the doctor's reputation. The son of a Baptist minister, Parham had retired from full-time practice three years before and was devoting most of his free time to his lifelong hobby — woodworking.

From a modest workshop behind his home, Parham had developed a reputation as a craftsman of hardwood furniture that would meet the exacting standards of the most finicky furniture maker. Pitts also knew that Parham had an appreciation for church furnishings and was a longtime parishioner of Greenwood First Baptist, a church famous for its majestic beauty.

Pitts' request was simple: help Furman locate someone to build 26 candle staffs for the Charles Ezra Daniel Chapel. Ted Ellett, widow of economics professor J. Carlyle Ellett, agreed to underwrite the project.

Parham was glad to help, and he and Pitts began examining designs and proposals. But they couldn't find one they liked. Some were too gaudy, others too simple — and most were too expensive.

"Finally, I just agreed to build them myself," says Parham.

After researching candle staffs, Parham crafted a simple, elegant design, then began a quest for the right kind of wood. He had two requirements: It had to be cherry, one of the finest hardwoods. And it had to be perfect — straight grain with no knots, defects or moisture problems.

After a meticulous search, he hand-selected a stock of wood harvested in northeastern Pennsylvania, a region known for its cherry trees. The wood was delivered to Greenwood in November of 1999.

Often working late into the night, Parham invested more than 300 hours painstakingly crafting the candle staffs. Much of his time was spent on the intricate basket-weave design near the top of each staff.

Parham constructed four 102-inch candle staffs for the choir loft and 22 92-inch staffs



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Jack Parham (right) and Ted Ellett joined forces to make the beautiful candle staffs a reality.

that can be attached to every third aisle seat in the sanctuary. He also built a storage stand for the staffs and a four-foot candle lighter. Furman employees John Mark McCain and Joe Reinovsky put the final touches on Parham's work, sanding the staffs and staining them to match the chapel's interior.

For Parham, the work was an act of faith and craftsmanship. "There is something about being able to express yourself in an object of permanent value," he says. "Woodworking is a fulfilling hobby that fosters creativity and productive use of one's time."

Much of his labor — beds, tables and cabinets — is enjoyed by family members and friends. He says he loves to work with "exotic" woods and is "an absolute fool" for antique chisels, which he collects.

"I feel complimented and honored to have been asked to do this project," Parham says. "I hope this work shows craftsmanship and execution of design compatible with the beautiful environment of the chapel."

— John Roberts

Symbols of faith

Jack Parham's explanation of the symbolism of the Daniel Chapel candle staffs:

Symbolism in the life of the church has been meaningful to me for many years. I was prompted and taught by the late Dr. James A. Bowers of First Baptist Church in Greenwood, S.C. I probably would not have undertaken this effort had it not been for his influence as a friend and minister.

Religious symbolism can be depicted in simple pieces. Symbolism is, of course, defined by individual interpretation. In designing these staffs, I came to look on them not as pieces of expensive wood, but as symbols of life's stages and our struggles to salvation.

At the base, the simple four sides represent the four facets of our true beginning — Mother, Father, God and Self. The straight grain in the staff is representative of the narrow upward path pointing to God.

The carved depictions of the cathedral windows symbolize the importance of the church in our lives. The collars symbolize obstacles and struggles to be overcome as we progress in life. The shadows represent dark times and dark places in our lives as we mature. The basket-weave pattern represents the increasingly complex problems faced through life.

As we progress through our lives, the ever-present light of God is always there to guide us. The spiral effect of left and right candleholders points to the apex through which we walk as we approach the altar of God.

terian Church in Marietta, Ga., and she is a district director with the Georgia State YMCA.

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Next reunion in 2005

Christine Aeschliman is a proofreader at Arthur Andersen in Atlanta, Ga., and is involved with theaters doing stage management. ■ **Emily Barnhill** is pursuing a master's degree in

elementary education at the University of South Carolina. ■ **Natalie Byars** attends the University of South Carolina School of Law. ■ **Brad Crenshaw** is studying for a master's degree in geological engineering at the University of Missouri-Rolla. ■ **Ginny Carroll** works in St. Nom la Breteche, France, as an au pair. ■ **Laura Christian** is pursuing a master's

degree in social work at the University of North Carolina. ■ **Mark Davis** is an educational programs intern with the International Rotary Foundation in Evanston, Ill. He is also studying to be a pilot. ■ **Joshua Dean** is studying for a master's degree in criminal justice at Northeastern University, where he received a graduate assistantship. ■ **Travis Filar**

teaches physical education at Bryson Elementary School in Simpsonville, S.C., and coaches volleyball and basketball at Eastside High School in Greenville. ■ **Carl Gregg** is enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University. ■ **Courtney Hamill** is an account management trainee for Bozell