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# Southeastern News

**Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

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## WILKINS BECOMES FIRST BLACK STUDENT PRESIDENT AT A SOUTHERN BAPTIST SEMINARY

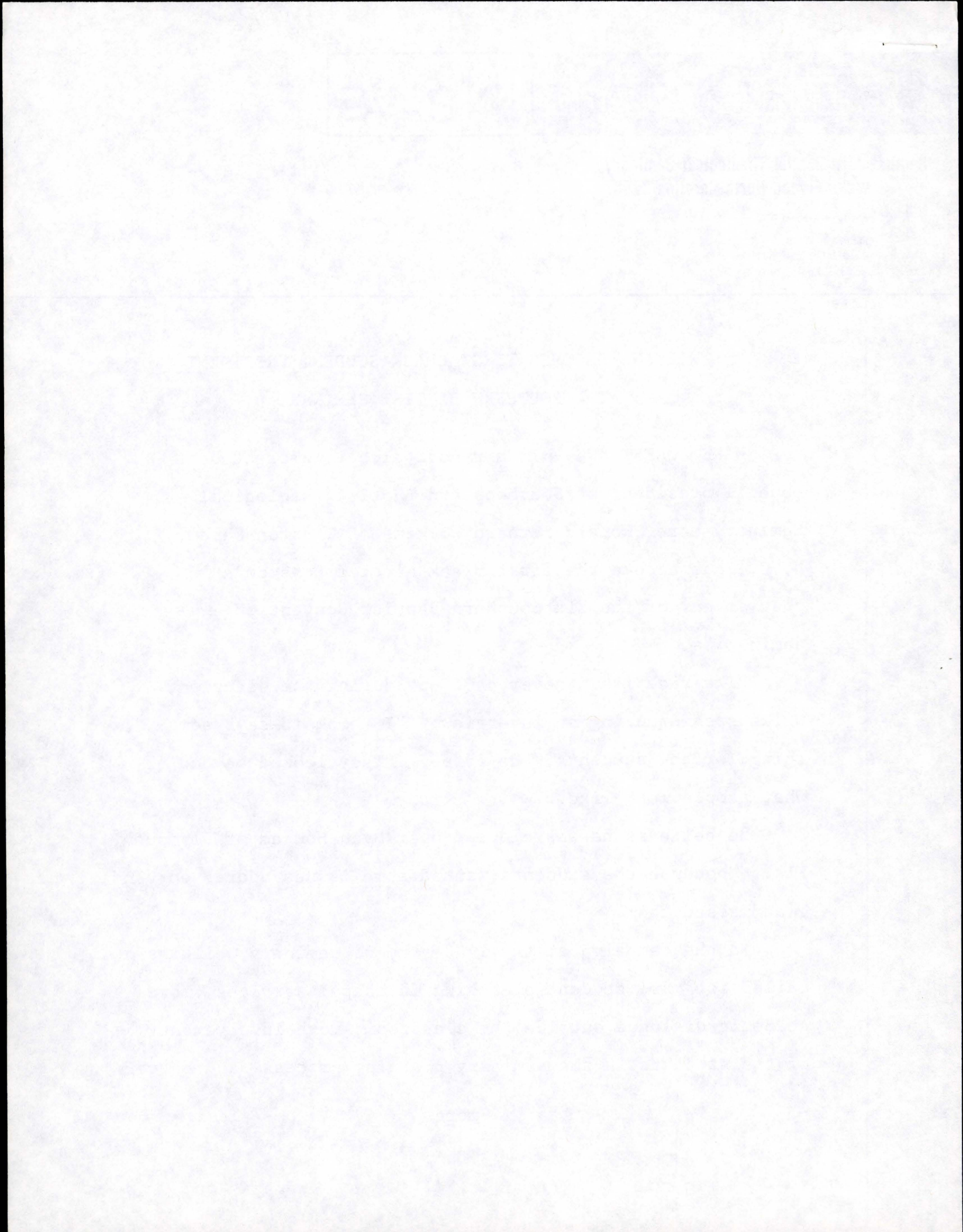
WAKE FOREST, NC - In a runoff election for student council president at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary here, Ronald Bernard Wilkins of Winston-Salem, N. C., has become the first black elected to such a post at any of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries.

"The race issue never came up" during the election, Wilkins said during an interview. "I think it says something for the students," he added. "They looked beyond what people look like."

He believes he was elected over Dyan Housam of Plymouth, Fla., "because the students wanted some issues addressed, and I addressed them."

In the campaign at the 1400-student seminary, Wilkins called for more student preaching in chapel services, more academic dialogue outside the classroom, more involvement of the students in the seminary planning process, and better

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communications when someone is sick or during other emergencies.

A second year student working toward his master's degree in religious education, Wilkins makes the 100-mile trip home to Winston-Salem every week-end to work at the Salvation Army.

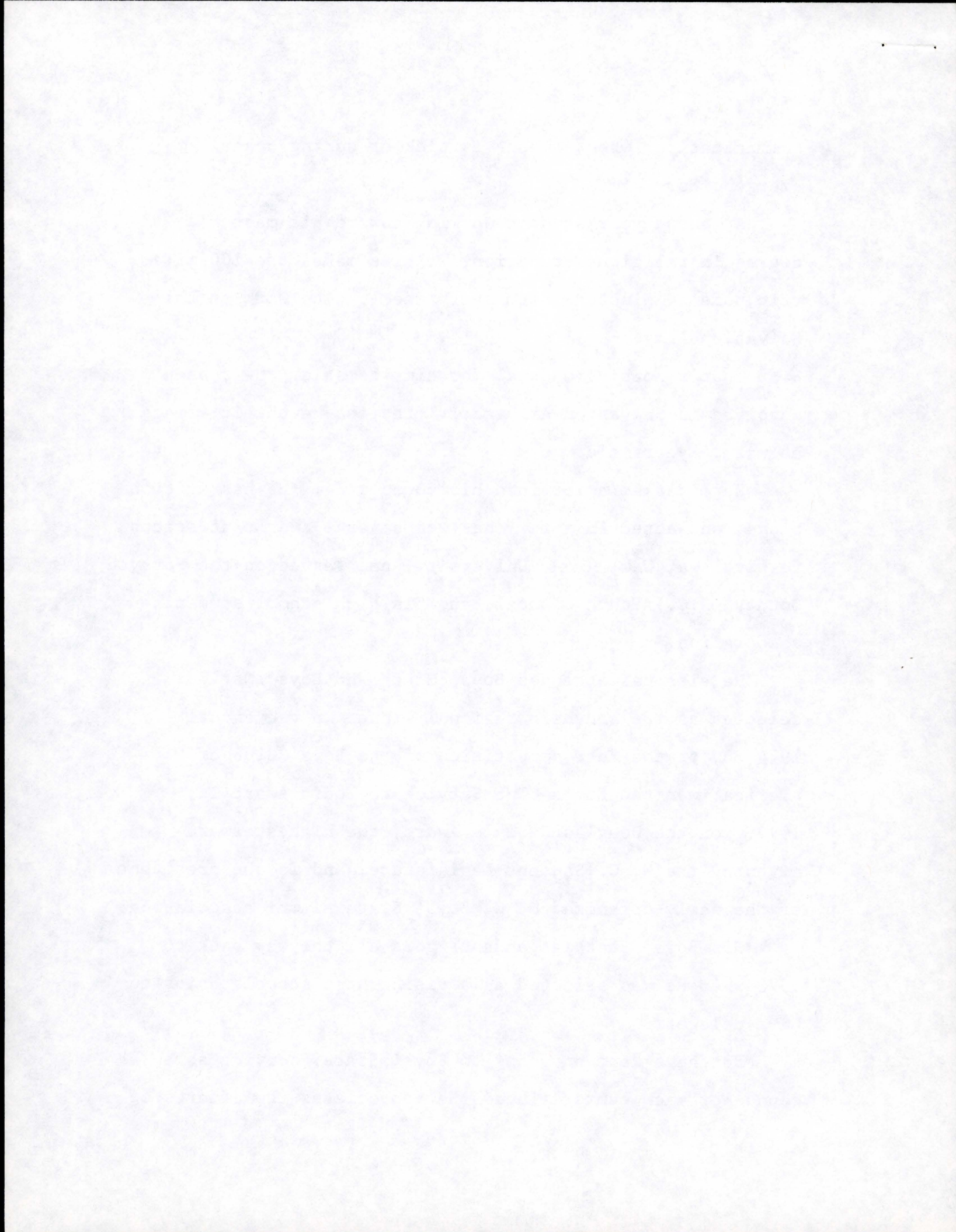
That's nothing unusual for him, he said. He's been involved in Salvation Army activities, as he put it, since he was 14 years old.

He's packed a lot into his young life. He has written plays, and acted in a few; has won several awards at speech festivals at Wake Forest University; has served on the Forsyth County (N.C.) Youth Council, and his high school student association.

He also has attended Boys' State and Boys' Nation; selected as the southern regional winner in the annual 1974 Boy of the Year competition of the Boys' Club of America; won the Boy's Club Service to Youth Award in 1979, won the Douglas Carlyle Award, the highest award given by the N. C. Student Legislature; and is the president of the newly organized N. C. Boys' State alumni association.

His Boys' State attendance goes all the way back to 1973 when he was selected as a rising high school senior to be a delegate.

But he's kept on going to Boys' State, serving as a counselor each summer since. He appreciates the efforts of



the American Legion, sponsor of the project, to perpetuate the ideals of citizenship.

Now Ron Wilkins has grown up. Physically, he's impressive at 6'3½" and 280 pounds. With his active background and recent victory, it's evident he's grown up in other ways, too.

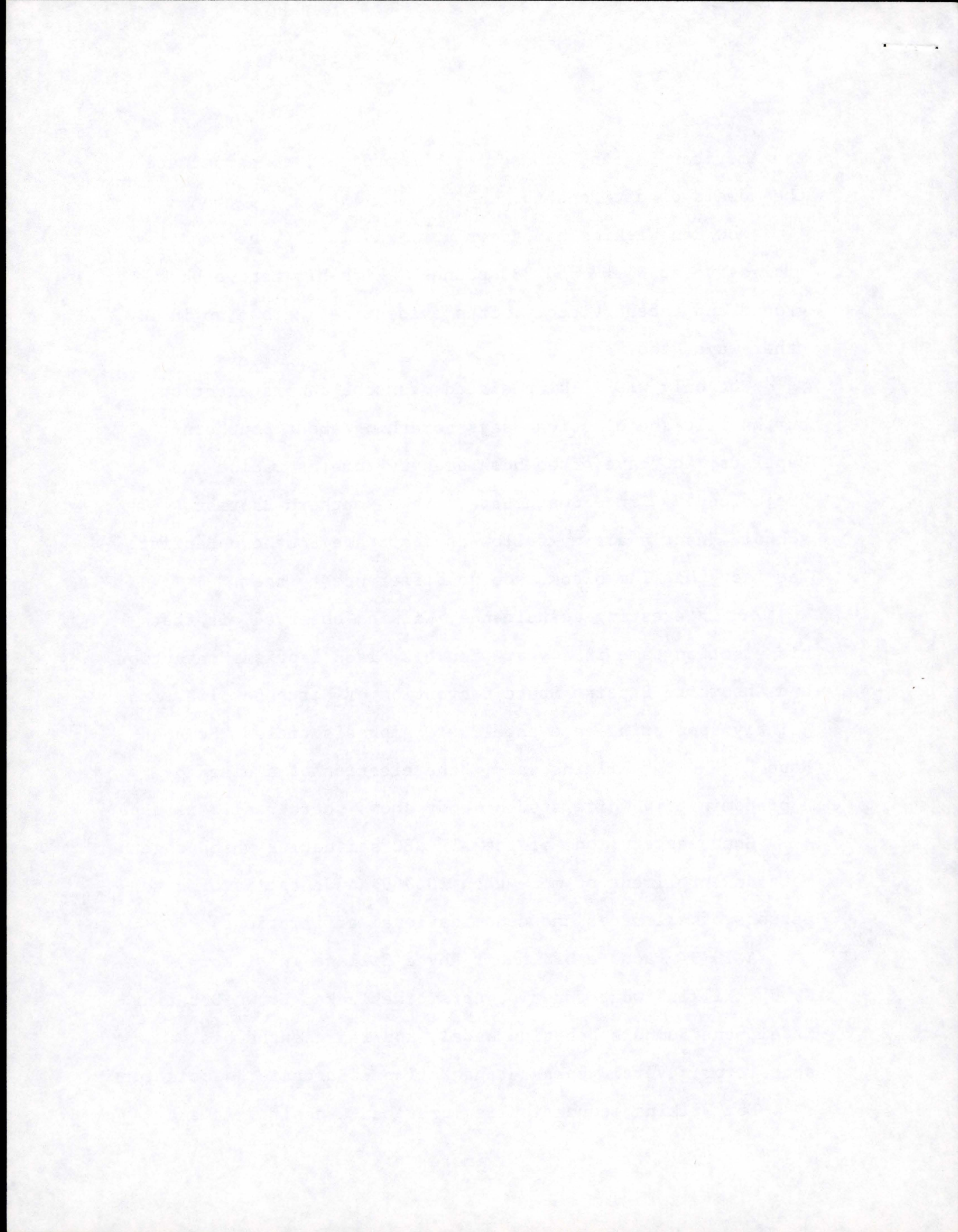
Not only was Wilkins elated over the campus election, but he felt the election "says something about Southern Baptists, who have often been seen by some as racist and prejudiced." Since Southeastern is a Southern Baptist school, "nearly all my fellow students are Southern Baptist. The fact that I'm black made no difference to them."

An interesting coincidence, Wilkins observed, is that his election came in a year when his black Baptist Convention and the white Baptist State Convention of North Carolina are jointly sponsoring an evangelistic emphasis titled "Here's Hope." "Well," Wilkins said, "the election of a black by a predominately white student body shows there really is hope."

Southeastern, one of the six SBC seminaries which together have an enrollment of more than 10,000 students, is open to persons of all races and denominational affiliations.

A 1979 graduate of Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, N. C., Wilkins won, for two years, the Tucker-Brown Debating Medal, the Summers Debating Medal, and represented his school for several years at the National Forensic Association.

For Wilkins, education is more than a desire, it's a



necessity. "But you can't go through school without money," he said, so he took his \$500 prize money from the Boys' Club of America competition and began his college studies at Montreat-Anderson College in North Carolina.

But to get through college, Ron had to "scramble" and work to earn his way. "But that's all right," he said, "I've got energy."

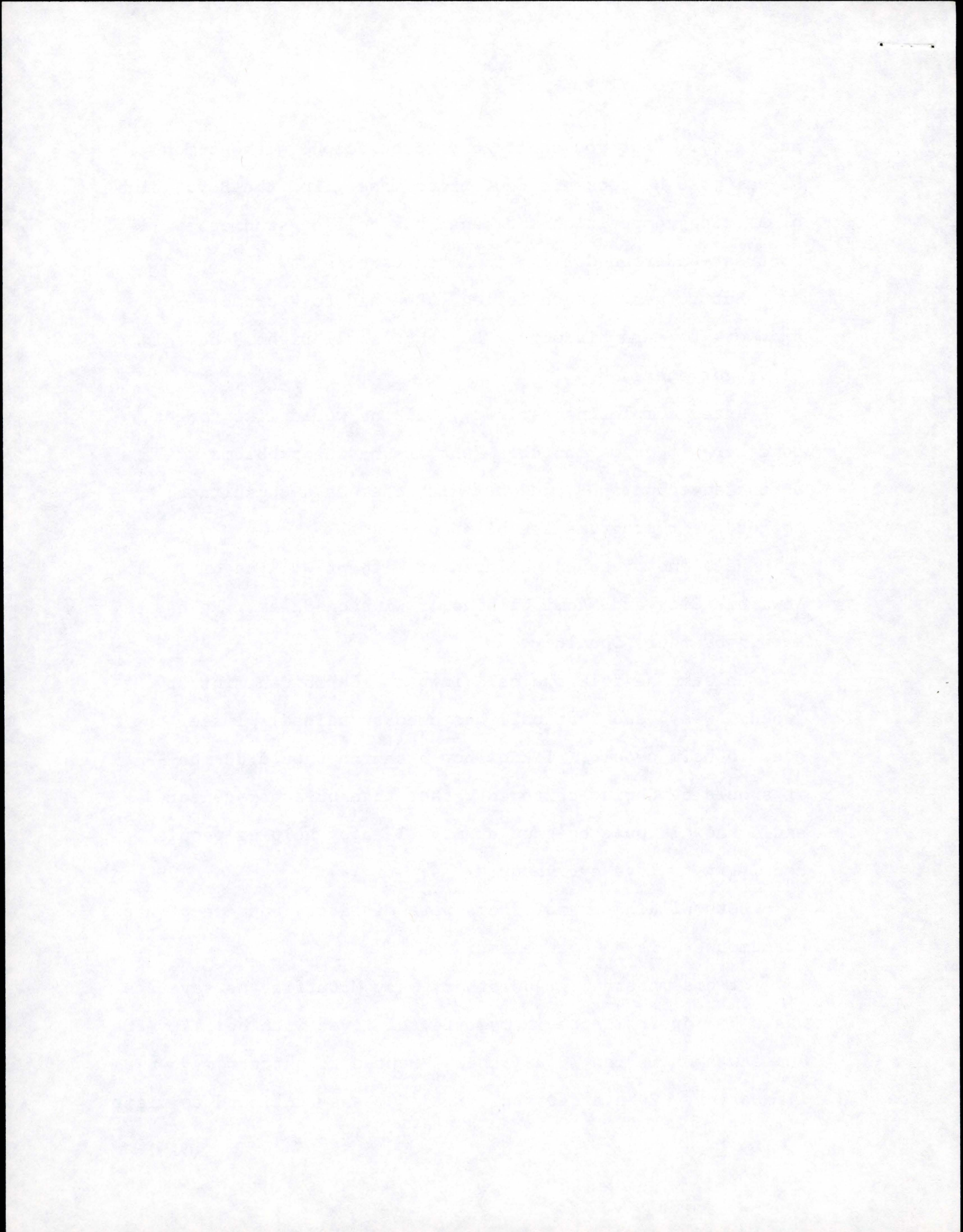
After completing seminary, Wilkins would like to get together with some churches "who are having problems with Christian education" and work with them as a consultant, to get their programs established.

He's one of seven children of Wilbert Wilkins of New York City and Naomi Wilkins of Winston-Salem. He has a twin brother, Donald.

He said he felt the call into the Christian ministry "when I was 6 and that call has been sustained. I feel the need to help people. I know how a church should be run -- it should be Christ-centered rather than preacher-centered -- and I know I would be good at it. I enjoy helping people and I try to love everybody."

Both Wilkins grandfathers were ministers and one of his grandmothers is an evangelist.

Of his maternal grandmother, Mary McDuffie, he says she was a "major influence in my life. I lived with her 14 years and saw a Christian life I knew I wanted to pattern my own life after. Even after she turned 80, she continued to visit





the sick folk in our community."

Wilkins has been licensed to preach by Morning Star Baptist Church in Winston-Salem. Ordination is his next step in the ministry.

In the meantime, Ron Wilkins is aiming to be "the kind of person my fellow students voted for when they looked beyond what I look like."

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