

# Biography

If laughter is truly the best medicine, then Dennis Swanberg, America's "Minister of Encouragement" is just what the doctor ordered. With his down-home charm and heaping helping of hospitality, this Austin, Texas born pastor-turned-comedian has won the hearts of audiences across the country. Raised in what he calls a "mostly blue-collar, but sometimes ring-around-the collar" family during the fifties, that old black and white television in the corner of the living room became an important part of making Swanberg the success he is today. "Most moms yell at kids to go outside and play, he remembers with a laugh, "My mom would say, 'you sit there and watch that television - your daddy worked so hard for it!'" her "encouragement's" paid off. One of the first voices the future impersonator nailed as a child was his television hero, Barney Fife, from "The Andy Griffith Show."

Today Swanberg takes Barney Fife and over twenty other lovable impersonations, together with his side-splitting stories of growing up, families, and the funny side of church, to over 250,000 people every year. His audiences range from churches looking for fresh and new inspiration, to marriage enrichment seminars, city-wide concerts, business related events and corporate gatherings. Dennis Swanberg doesn't care who he's talking to, as long as he can leave knowing he made someone's day a little brighter. His national broadcast television shows, "Swan's Place" and "The Dennis Swanberg Show", are described by the networks as "an hour of good, clean fun and entertainment as well as spiritual insight and encouragement" and are viewed by over one million households weekly. But even though this good ole' boy's legion of fans is growing daily, "The Swan" - as he is affectionately called - still loves the one on one of meeting people. "I feel like sometimes my kind of motivation and encouragement comes from just being personable with people beforehand and afterwards", he admits. "Mixing and mingling in a lobby before the show or grabbing a coffee afterwards is just as important to me as the hour I spend up on stage". It's just that kind of genuineness that has made several of this pastor-with-a-punchline's audience members remark that "If I lived in your town, I'd come to your church!"

Swanberg first discovered the persuasive powers of his humorous talents while back in high school. An incorrigible class clown since first grade, the student made quick work of his teachers, principal and coaches with his uncanny ability to mimic and impersonate voices and quirks. His antics, along with getting him sent to the principal's office, also quickly got him sent to the stage. Before you could say detention, Dennis found himself the master of ceremonies for his school's annual talent night. That performance started what has been a continuous string of phone calls inviting him to speak and share his unique brand of humor with audiences in churches, businesses, retreats, conferences and parties. "I always thought I might end up being a crazy radio DJ," he says, "or one of those funny TV weatherman." God, however, had other plans. While at college Swanberg was also serving as a minister of youth at a local church. His busy schedule, however, did not keep him from still earning the title "the many voices of Baylor" through his continuing performances. It was around that time that Dennis remembers the strong feeling that God was calling him into the ministry. "Of course," he remembers with a chuckle, "you think when God calls that He wants you to preach or lead music or go into the mission field. What I've come to realize now is that the Lord can allow you to be a minister in many different ways." One of his heroes, not surprisingly, is Grady Nutt, the late southern-Baptist preacher-comedian who brought country charm and a dose of humor to church life via his spot on the popular variety show, "Hee-Haw". "The first time he performed at Baylor University I said, 'Well, Lord, there's hope for me!'" While serving in various pastorates over the years including Rogers and Saginaw, Texas, Hot Springs, Arkansas and West Monroe, Louisiana, Dennis still held his "sideline" entertainment profession, but was constantly nagged with the feeling that maybe his stage talents should become his full-time career. The day after making what he calls his

“leap of faith” into stepping down from church senior pastor to stepping up to the microphone, his decision was rewarded with popular radio talk show host Dr. James Dobson playing one of Swanberg’s performances on the air. The response was explosive. Calls began pouring in from everywhere for even more appearances and speaking engagements. Later that month Swanberg remembers his nervousness before speaking in front of an audience that included Dr. Dobson. “I prayed, ‘Oh, Lord, help me do good.’ And He said, ‘Swan, I can take your best stuff and make it fall on deaf ears or I can take your shallow stuff and make folks think it’s really something.’ So I said, ‘Lord, take my shallow stuff and make them think it’s really good!’”

The story is typical of Dennis’ ability to take everyday life with it’s ups and downs and turn it into an act that’s more than just an act. As a motivational speaker, teacher, preacher, author, counselor, TV personality, and humorist, Dennis Swanberg knows just what it takes to make life a more pleasant road to journey down - with a laugh or two along the way. His routines regularly include hilarious send-ups and his own family life, both as a child growing up in Texas and as a husband and parent today to his wife Lauree and two young adult sons, Dusty and Chad. Rivaling anyone who’s ever set foot on the Tonight Show stage, Swanberg’s list of impersonations include Don Knotts, Pat Butram (Mr. Haney of Green Acres), Walter Brennan, Howard Cosell, Muhammad Ali, Ronald Reagan, Billy Graham, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Forrest Gump, Slim Pickins, John Wayne, Ross Perot, Jimmy Stewart, Bert and Ernie and a host of other Sesame Street characters and many more. Add to all that talent, a man with a heart of gold whose biggest joy is seeing others happy and you’ll discover the magic that is Dennis Swanberg.

This year Swanberg will appear at over 150 churches, conferences, businesses and concert events while his popular TBN and FamNet television shows continue to be aired weekly. He has also authored seven books and an additional book on men’s ministry is scheduled to hit the marketplace during the upcoming year. And as always, he’ll be bringing a note of encouragement, a pocketful of hilarious stories and a great big bag of joy and laughter wherever he goes.

“I try to bring people laughter, but my advice to them is always that joy is a choice. Happiness is dependent upon what happens in your life, but joy is a choice you can make every single day. It takes an act of your will...even if you don’t feel joyful at the moment. And it takes dying to yourself and coming alive in the lives of others around you. I want to motivate my audiences to have courage, to be strong, to look for the moments in life that make them realize they are an important part of this world. Do your best to go out there risking. We live in a world where you can afford to fail and try again. I want people to realize that this is a great life to enjoy. And the one way you can enjoy life is by helping other people enjoy it too.”

Looks like this doctor of encouragement writes his own prescriptions.