

Better Days

Prison extends open invitation to local churches

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

The McGee Hedgley Chapel is not unlike any other sanctuary. Its white and burgundy walls are made brighter by sunlight from several windows; a large wooden cross sits on the wall behind a small pulpit; and the room's natural acoustics amplify every amen, sermon and song.

But parishioners at this chapel do not go home after the service. McGee Hedgley is on the grounds of the Forsyth Correctional Center. Those who frequent it are men who have taken a path less traveled and are now seeking God for renewal.

Forsyth County Jail and Prison Ministries administers the services at the chapel as well as services at the jail downtown. Although the Jail and Prison Ministries has chaplains that help prisoners with their spiritual needs, local churches are often invited to take part. The Jail and Prison Ministries embraces all faiths, but is Christian-based.

"We bring in so many churches that we run the range of all denominations and theologies, so

we feel that somebody is going to pick up something," said Edyce Elworth, director of development for the ministries.

Last week, members of the college praise team - Winston-Salem State University students fresh from exams and newly into their summer break - from Cleveland Avenue Christian Church brought a crowd of more than a dozen inmates to their feet with a selection of hand-clapping and foot-stomping spirituals.

The visit was initiated by the church, Elworth said. Cleveland Avenue's prison ministry is just a few years old. Min. Paulette Pouncey, who directs the church's ministry, said the church wants to make regular visits to the prison and the jail, and develop the most active prison ministry in the county.

"This is the kind of ministry that people do not want to get



Pouncey

involved in, but people at Cleveland Avenue have embraced this ministry and are willing to work with it," Pouncey said.

Kedrick Lowery, the youth minister at Cleveland Avenue, had a room of eager ears as he delivered his sermon, which was centered around renewal and redemption.

Many in the sanctuary nodded slowly and said amins as Lowery told them that his sermon was not for those who have never made mistakes or made bad decisions in life.

"This is not for those of us who have arrived," he said. "It's for those of us who have problems."

Lowery's sermon is indicative of most that are preached in the chapel, Elworth said. It's a message that many of the inmates can relate to, she said.

"Redemption and reconciliation is really the reason why Forsyth County Prison Ministries is here," she said. "We are trying to reconcile these men and women to their families, to their communities and back to God. Through God, we feel, is the only way that a man can make a sig-



Photo by Kevin Walker

The Rev. Kedrick Lowery prepares his sermon as members of the college praise team sing.

nificant change in his heart that he's going to need when he goes back out there in the world."

Tears flowed down the faces of some of the inmates as Lowery switched the focus of his sermon to the topic of change. Citing instances from the Bible, he told the inmates that many who have strayed from the straight and narrow have found renewal through faith.

"As long as there is breath,

there is hope," he said.

Pouncey threw her hands into the air in praise after Lowery made the statement. She is not ashamed to admit that she is proof that his words are true.

At 17, she was locked away for robbery. Since leaving jail, she found God and now feels she has a calling to help those not in the best circumstances. She ministers in crime-ridden neighborhoods as well.

Pouncey said people in prison and those down and out embrace her message because they want renewal and hope.

"When you are in that situation, you have done everything else and you want to try something new," Pouncey said. "(Worshipping God) gives you a chance to reflect on your life, because you don't want to be the same anymore. You want change."

Atkins students tell stories through art

School plans to seek more grants to spur creativity



Photos by Melde Rutledge

One of the murals done by the students depicts a heart.



Hicks and Elmore pose in the school's library.

BY MELDE RUTLEDGE
THE CHRONICLE

During his first year of teaching at Atkins Middle School, Jeffrey Elmore wanted to find a way to make his students more appreciative of art.

In his effort to stimulate their interest, Elmore brought books of artwork to class - such as "Walls of Heritage/Walls of Pride: African American Murals," which features works by acclaimed artists such as James and John Biggers - and took his students to Winston-Salem State University to view some of the artists' works in Diggs Gallery and O'Kelly Library. In addition, the class observed WSSU art students draw.

The two huge murals by James and John Biggers in the library ultimately caught the students' attention, though. Both of these works, "Ascension" and "Origins," were thoroughly observed and interpreted by the eighth-graders with much surprise to Elmore.

Murals are abstract paintings that are drawn directly to a wall's surface that usually tell a story by the use of symbolism.

Returning to school, the class's main agenda was to make a mural of their own. Elmore divided the class into groups of four and five and allowed the

students to follow their artistic intuitions.

The nine-week project resulted in five murals that tell their own unique tales, such as "The Immoral Impact," the story of a father who doesn't keep his promises. As the result of his lies, his ears, lips and teeth grow.

"Art is a struggle for some kids, but these kids really pushed themselves to get this kind of impact," said Elmore. "They were professional artists in this."

About the same time that the Atkins students were at work on their art, the school received a federal grant for \$1,500. According to Jan Hicks, who has been a librarian at the school for about three years, the money was used to help turn the library into a "cultural center."

Display cases were brought into the library, which accommodated drawings and sculptures by other art students. More artwork surrounds the library, including the murals by Elmore's art class.

Kristine Ellis, a student of Elmore, was excited about having her work displayed for everyone to see, and was even more elated to find out that the murals will remain up in the library permanently.

"I feel good about it," she said. "He (Elmore) told us it will be up there for a long time."

Ellis loves art, but wants to pursue a career in business at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte after high school.

Both Hicks and Elmore hope that more grants continue to

arrive so that other students are able to perform similar projects to be displayed, but "it's hard to get resources like this," Hicks said, because of limits on school funding.

The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemeye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc., 617 N. Liberty St., Winston-Salem, NC 27101. Periodicals Postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The Chronicle, PO Box 1636
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636

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Quotables:

"The individual who can do something that the world wants done will, in the end, make his way regardless of his race."
- Booker T. Washington, 1901

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(Check all that apply)

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