

A TRADITION RETURNS

First Baptist revives holiday show

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

More than 800 people came out last weekend to take part in the resurrection of a deep-rooted tradition at First Baptist Church on Highland Avenue.

The church's annual Nativity Pageant dates back more than four decades, to a time when the community surrounding the church thrived. Neighbors came from far and wide to watch the performances, remembers Sylvia Conrad, a member of the Women's Progressive Club, which has traditionally spearheaded the pageant's production.

"In the early days, it was a big December event," she related. "I remember the children being very involved, in the pageant... the whole church really participated as much as possible."

The pageant was founded by the late Louise Smith, who was a longtime member of the church.

"She wanted to do something at Christmastime for people to come by and see in the black neighborhood," explained Christine Evans, one of the organizers of this year's program. "The pageant began to grow; every year, they began to do more and more with it."

As time marched on, the neighborhood around the church began to change and turnout declined. The pageant was discontinued in the 1980s.

Last year, the members of the Women's Progressive decided to revive the old play in Smith's memory. Attendance was good in the inaugural year of its revival, says Evans. The event attracted more than 200 to its two evening performances.



Photo by Layla Farmer

Christine Evans, Ianthe Nivens as Mary; Michael Conrad as Joseph; and wife Sylvia Conrad.

Organizers were hopeful that the 2008 season, resplendent with live animals and custom-made costumes, would draw an even larger crowd.

"We feel like it's going to be real special this time," Evans said on the eve of the first two performances, which were held Friday evening at the church.

A third pageant was held during the worship hour on Sunday, followed by Communion.

"I hope it really helps people to get into the season and more or less the reason for the season," Evans remarked. "We're just trying to do everything we can to let people know that (even in hard economic times) there is a light that's still shining - there is hope."

Bringing the pageant back is just one of many conscious efforts church members are making to get back to the congregation's roots, which are steeped in community involvement, says Conrad, who has been a member of the church for more than 40 years.

"Our pastor is trying to revive some of the old activities that the church was involved in (and) becoming a more integral part of the community," she said of Rev. Darryl Aaron, who took the helm of the church just over a year ago.

In the age of glitzy lights and Santa Claus, the pageant served as a tangible reminder of the true meaning of the holiday, Conrad added.

"I think people should come out because it is the Christmas season, the season in which we all should pay homage and tribute to our Savior, who was born at this time of year," she stated.

The pageant was a gesture of goodwill to the entire community, Evans said.

"Christmas is not all about gifts; it's about showing love," she said.

To which, Conrad added, "This is our gift to the community."

First Baptist Church is located at 700 Highland Ave. For more information, call 336-722-5605.



Photo by Kevin Walker

Sheep graze as angels hark during last week's first performance.

HIV

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cannot get HIV from mosquitoes.

How can HIV infection be prevented?

The best way to prevent HIV is to avoid risky behaviors, such as using intravenous drugs, having unprotected sex, or having multiple partners. No matter what your age, if you are sexually active (particularly with a new partner), male latex condoms and female polyurethane condoms offer the best protection and should be used for all sexual encounters. Persons who have been diagnosed with another sexually transmitted infection (such as syphilis, herpes, chlamydia) are also at higher risk of contracting HIV, as the virus can also be transmitted through open sores, abrasions, or cuts.

It is also important to talk to your partner(s) about

HIV/AIDS before you have sex. Learn as much as you can about each partner's past behavior (sex and drug use), and consider the risks to your health before you have sex. Ask your partners if they have recently been tested for HIV; encourage those who have not been tested to do so.

To protect yourself, remember the ABCs:

- A = Abstinence
- B = Be Faithful
- C = Condoms

How do I know if I have HIV?

The only way to know for sure whether you are infected with HIV is to get a blood test. Your local health department as well as many free clinics and other health organizations across the state provide free or low cost HIV testing and counseling. Detecting the virus early is important, because it allows for the best treatment options and for behavior changes to prevent others from

becoming infected! Some people experience flu-like symptoms shortly after contracting the virus, but other people may have no symptoms at all. Sometimes, the virus can live for years in the body before producing clinical symptoms. This is often the time when it is spread unknowingly from person to person, so it is important to get tested to reduce the spread of this terrible disease.

- Contribution by Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity

Do you need further information on this topic or resources in your area or have questions or comments about this article? Please call toll-free 1-877-530-1824. Or, for more information about the Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity, please visit our website: <http://www.wfubmc.edu/minorityhealth>.

Obama

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sage of change and hope. Cox said, he realized "it wasn't just Obama. It was the American people getting mobilized."

People worldwide saw the same thing, Cox said.

"If we can recognize that and build on it, we can change the world!"

The conference participants issued a list of recommendations for Obama, including that he establish an independent, bipartisan commission to examine U.S. interrogation and detention practices.

The conference also proposed ending detention without due process for suspected terrorists held at

Guantanamo Bay and urged the next president to issue an executive order prohibiting torture by any agent of the U.S. government.

"The executive order is just to follow the law," Ryan said, noting that many of the interrogation practices condoned in recent years are violations of existing statutes, or rules and regulations.

Saad Ibrahim, an Egyptian now living in exile after being jailed for opposing the Mubarak regime, said he was schooled in the United States in the 50s and 60s, observing black Americans' quest for civil rights.

"I learned not to be com-

pliant," Ibrahim said. In recent years, he watched with sadness as "America has come down from the mountain to the depths."

Ibrahim urged Americans to get involved in the international struggle for rights for economic development, for children, and the right to food.

"Why would the most generous people I have known refuse to sign a covenant guaranteeing the right to food?" he asked.

"You have to be actively involved," Ibrahim said. "You have to be engaged. You have to guard the things you have."

The tragedy of Sept. 11, Ibrahim said, "was used as a pretext to undermine some of the very dear values held by America."

"Use your liberty, use your freedom to help us obtain and keep ours," he pleaded.



Cox

Photos by Layla Farmer

WSSU SGA President Harold Repass makes a suggestion.



MLK

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and cons of each development suggestion. At the front of the room, a clump of easels sporting giant Post-it pads awaited the groups' results.

"We are not here to show you concepts that we've already generated; we are really here to listen," said Paul Brailsford, CEO of Brailsford and Dunlavey, the Washington, D.C.-based facility management and program management firm in charge of transforming the MLK Corridor.

Known as The Golden Mile, the corridor runs along Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and is flanked by Winston-Salem State University and

Bowman Gray Stadium.

"There's definitely a need for (a plan)," commented Carol Davis, executive director of WSSU's S.G. Atkins CDC, one of the major players in the project. "Downtown has their master plan; the (Piedmont Triad) Research Park has their master plan, but there was not a master plan for MLK."

Since the spring, Brailsford and Dunlavey has worked collaboratively with the CDC, the City of Winston-Salem and

the university to develop a strategic master plan for revitalization of the area, much of which has fallen into disarray. "The tangible benefit of this project is a future that reflects the needs of our student, faculty and staff,"

commented WSSU Chancellor Donald Reaves.

"The university will continue to be an active partner in this period of renaissance."

The firm has worked with the university several times over the last decade, and has witnessed its rapid transportation in recent years, said Brailsford.

"It's attracting to be with people who believe in themselves and have a can-do attitude, and that's what the university has developed," he said of his motivation to again embark upon a project with WSSU. "It's a transformative place."

A team of consultants from Brailsford and Dunlavey were on hand Monday, to lead WSSU students, administrators and city residents through the process. The firm has led similar projects all over the nation and has worked with countless universities, yet

the fervor they witnessed at Monday's charrette impressed Project Manager Danielle Peterson.

"There seems to be a lot of interest in improving the corridor," she remarked. "The residents... as well as the student-residents, are equally excited about seeing something (positive) happen. It's great to see the students and the community working together."


At the close of the meeting, the groups presented their ideas for the project. Suggestions ran the gamut, from an overhead walkway to allow students to safely cross the busy boulevard; to adding retail space and mixed use facilities and zoning out the "hoochie coochie" clubs.

Brailsford and Dunlavey took the suggestions under advisement and is expected to produce a plan for the corridor by February 2009.



Brailsford

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