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RELIGION

God's Gang

Group of teens see miracle in a few small fish. See page 11A.

Sunday School LESSON



"Living hope."

That's what Peter calls it. And it is one of the most exciting concepts in the New Testament.

This kind of hope is rooted in the past, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Peter 1:3), and focused on the future, "the salvation that is ready to be revealed" the last time (I Peter 1:5).

This lesson is presented with a prayer that it will help you and your students reclaim that biblical kind of hope.

One of the popular television programs that came out a couple of years ago is Early Edition. It's about a man who receives tomorrow's newspaper today.

Every week our hero, Gary, reads a headline - "Child Struck by Car" or "Disgruntled Employee Shoots Four" - and then sets about to avert the disaster he knows is about to happen that no one else knows.

It is not exactly hope, but it's close. Gary has a confidence about the future that is more than a guess or a feeling.

In that, he becomes a model for Christians. We, too, have a confidence about the future.

God has given us an "early edition," telling us about the future of our world and the next.

We who share the gospel will not always be believed. Some will be suspicious of us.

This letter is addressed to Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (I Peter 1:1, 2).

How often do you praise God for your new birth and hope in Christ? In what kinds of occasions is it easiest to praise him?

At first the believers were "enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:47). That changed quickly, first for Peter and the other apostles, and then for the whole church.

Friends 'turn in' church arsonists in Texas

By Juan B. Elizondo, Jr. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN - Richard Miller and Jerry Shawn Scott say they told investigators their friend and another man set a fire that burned down the Macedonia Baptist Church in Ferris because it was the right thing to do.

On Tuesday, Miller and Scott were rewarded for the information they provided. Charlotte, based NationsBank gave both

men checks for \$10,000 as rewards in helping to convict Robert Stillman and Randall Moore of arson.

Scott said Stillman was his best friend before the March fire at the 100-year-old church, which has a predominantly black-member congregation, south of Dallas.

"He walked up to me and ... (Miller) and said it was done. They burned it down," Scott said. "I thought he had more sense

than that."

Scott added that Stillman indicated the arson was racially motivated.

Miller said federal arson investigators contacted him after the fire because he and Scott were seen with Stillman and Moore shortly after the fire, which destroyed the church.

"I just told them what he said," Miller said.

Stillman and Moore pleaded

guilty to setting the fire in U.S. district court earlier this year. Stillman was sentenced in July to five years in prison. Moore's sentence was five years and 10 months in prison.

Since 1995, federal, state and local arson officials have investigated more than 350 suspicious church fires. More than 130 people have been arrested in connection with 97 of those fires and investigations continue.

"These outrageous and intolerable crimes stirred our conscience," said Tim Arnault, president of NationsBank Southwest. "We felt the impact from these acts because 45 of the church burnings occurred throughout the communities in 10 of the states that we serve."

The Rev. Samuel Hargers, pastor of Macedonia Baptist, said his congregation of 45 to 50 people

See CHARLOTTE on page 11A

Winter wonderland



Snow blankets the grounds of Nations Ford Baptist Church in South Charlotte. A winter storm dumped more than an inch of snow on Charlotte Monday.

PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Faith community embraces Kwanzaa

By Jeri Young THE CHARLOTTE POST

Across the nation, many black churches are taking part in services marking Kwanzaa, the nation's only African American holiday.

"We're acknowledging who we are by this means. I lived through a day when African American people were kind of apologizing for who they are," said the Rev. Daniel Morgan, pastor of Guidance Church of Religious Science in South Los Angeles.

Kwanzaa, a seven-day holiday that runs through New Year's Day, has been gaining worldwide popularity since it was created.

Morgan's church was among several Los Angeles churches that took part in a city wide celebration of the holiday created three decades ago by college professor and activist Maulana Karenga. Millions now celebrate the cultural event, which celebrates the seven principles of black unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and

faith.

In Charlotte, as in Los Angeles, local churches are hosting services during the holiday, which is coordinated each year by the Afro-American Cultural Center.

The week began with services at Greater Providence Baptist Church and will end Thursday at Muhammad Mosque Number 36.

Kwanzaa was celebrated last night at First Baptist Church-West and tonight at the McCrorey YMCA. Tonight's event, the Karamu, a potluck dinner, is extremely popular. Participants are invited to bring a covered dish to share with others.

Muhammad Mosque leader Minister Robert Muhammad said he was "honored to be asked to host" a Kwanzaa service, which organizers estimate more than 200 people will attend.

"I think any mosque or part of the faith community should allow the buildings they use for worship to be used for community function," Muhammad said. "Since

Kwanzaa is becoming a more noted and celebrated holiday, I felt it was my responsibility to open our building for the service."

Muhammad sees Kwanzaa as an opportunity to build bridges between different faith groups.

"I think it is a holiday that if practiced properly - as Dr. Karenga envisioned it - it can become a viable expression of the black experience in America," Muhammad said. "Since it doesn't involve religious expression, it can allow us to come together. It invokes unity."

Karenga, head of the Department of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach, celebrated the 30th anniversary of Kwanzaa in Charlotte last year.

"Kwanzaa has great depth and meaning as one of the first initiation experiences for many of us back into our culture," said R. W. Akile, chairman of Kwanzaa People of Color, which organized the Los Angeles festival.

"One of the things you can see happening during Kwanzaa is the telling of

our story."

Charlotte Kwanzaa organizer, Ahmad Daniels, says the move to local churches will help "get the word out" about the holiday.

"It gives us a chance for a broader reach," Daniels said. "Having the services at local churches puts Kwanzaa into the minds of some people who wouldn't normally come to the services."

According to Daniels, AACC sought local churches when services outgrew space at the Center.

"There just wasn't enough space," Daniels said. "We went to ministers we thought would be open to hosting a service. The response was great. And we have a good representation of the community."

As the holiday grows in popularity, some black groups complain that, like Christmas and other holidays, it is getting increasingly commercialized and exploited by mainstream companies that market Kwanzaa products such as greeting cards.

"As long as the African American See KWANZAA on page 11A

Black pastor heads white church

By Eric Fraizer THE CHARLESTON POST AND COURIER

CHARLESTON, S.C. - This is a story about peace on earth, and good will among men.

But it's not exactly about a baby lying in a manger, or shepherds watching their flocks by night, or wise men coming from the East.

This is the story of a large, all-white suburban church, of the black minister who came to lead them and of how they all simply went on with their lives as if nothing could have been more normal.

The congregation and the preacher agree: There is a

parable about how easily folks of different backgrounds can live together in harmony when they put their minds to it.

The story began six months ago, when United Methodist church leaders appointed the Rev. H. Samuel Johnson, a 56-year-old preacher who grew up in the mostly black Neck Area, to lead Mount Pleasant's Hibben United Methodist Church, a booming all-white suburban congregation of 1,200 souls.

J.O. Shuler, a retired veterinarian who has attended the church for some 40 years, admits he had reservations at first.

But no fireworks went off, no tempers flared, no ugly prejudices seeped out.

It turned out that the new preacher wasn't all that different after all.

He was just going about his business, same as any other preacher, same as any other man trying to his job well.

"He's not controversial at all. He's just one heck of a good man," Shuler said. "I personally am tickled to death with him, and everybody in the church seems to be."

Ditto for Mrs. J.O. Shuler, the church historian.

"There are lots of people like me (in the church) who are

from the Old South," she said, "but most of these people you couldn't run them out of this church with a stick no matter who you sent as pastor, and we've got a good pastor."

Johnson, who had spent the past eight years as superintendent over Charleston-area United Methodist churches, doesn't seem the least bit surprised.

Since coming to Hibben, he has baptized babies, counseled members, led fund-raising for a new family life center and accepted about 30 new families into the church.

Far as he can tell, he's not See MINISTER on page 11A

Forget New Year's bashes Churches open doors for services

By Jeri Young THE CHARLOTTE POST

Looking for something faith based to bring in the New Year?

Several local churches and organizations will host New Year's eve services.

Jubilate, 7 p.m. Charlotte Coliseum - Concert features music by several of the gospel industry's most popular performers including the Howard and Vestal Goodman and Jessie Dixon. Tickets are \$17.50 in advance and can be purchased through TicketMaster or by calling 522-6500.

Two local churches will hold Watch Night services. Services begin at 10:30 at First Mount Calvary Baptist Church, 209 W. 28th St. At 11 p.m. Grace AME Zion and Little Rock AME Zion will hold a combined service at Grace, 219 South Brevard St.

Special services continue New Year's Day.

First Baptist Church-West, 1801 Oaklawn Ave., will hold an Emancipation Proclamation service. The keynote speaker is former Progressive National Baptist Convention head, the Rev. William Augustus Jones.

Jones, a long-time civil and human rights activist, pastors Bethany Baptist Church and is the author of several Christian writings on the church and social issues.

He has served as a professor at Union Theological Seminary, Colgate Rochester Divinity School and Wesley Theological Seminary.

The service marks the signing of

the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation, signed during the Civil War by President Abraham Lincoln, freed slaves in the Confederate states and is celebrated throughout the year in the various segments of the African American community.

First Baptist organizers hope the service will be a "means of fostering community."

The service begins at 11 a.m. On Saturday, the Rev. John P. Kee and the New Life Community Choir will be in concert at Ovens Auditorium.

Special guests include the Sensational Nightingales and Erick Matthews.

The concert begins at 7 p.m. For more information, call 537-3708.



Jones



Kee