

Church assembles portable villages for volunteer efforts

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DURHAM, N.C.—Hurricane season may not have hit hard yet, but at Westminster Presbyterian Church they're already working to house the volunteers who'll flock to wherever disaster may strike.

About 40 members of the congregation are assembling volunteer villages, clusters of buildings that can be folded flat and shipped to areas in need of places for an influx of volunteers to stay while helping hurricane-struck residents.

"It's a complete village when they get there, so they can concentrate on helping victims of the disaster," explained the Rev. Paul Ransford, known to the Westminster faithful as the church's "Disaster Pastor" for heading up its disaster response ministry.

The church first encountered the novel buildings when about a dozen parishioners assembled six villages across the Gulf Coast last fall

after Hurricane Katrina struck. This year, the church had Florida-based Unifold Shelters Ltd. ship the shelters by the truckful to the church campus on Old Chapel Hill Road, where volunteers from Westminster and Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church have spent evenings and weekends putting them together.

The weatherproof buildings arrive as flat sheets of tough corrugated plastic. They fold into tunnels which can be made into 10-foot square units to house three or four people, or combined into larger, 11-by-22 administrative buildings with kitchens and bathrooms.

The United Nations and American Red Cross also use Unifold buildings, as does the National Guard Church member Jan McCallum, who's coordinating this year's Westminster project, said the shelters were often used as decontamination units.

The tunnels are walled in with more plastic at one end

and tent-style doors at the other. It's all held together with anchor straps and rivets installed with air compressors and drills bought by the church.

A tractor-trailer can hold 30 small and five large ready-to-use huts. Although they're too lightweight to survive a hurricane themselves, the buildings can easily get out of harm's way.

"If you need to take them down, they fold right up," McCallum said.

"They bounce back, too. 'All you have to do is walk around and kick them and they expand out again,'" Ransford said.

Westminster started providing hurricane relief under the umbrella of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance after Hurricane Floyd, in the hard-hit eastern North Carolina town of Tarboro. The group swooped in again after Hurricane Isabel, this time into Hyde County, where the church youth group built a house, before heading to the

Gulf Coast last year and living in what Ransford called a "tent city" while building villages out of the collapsible buildings.

Thanks to drivers and trucks supplied by TROSA (Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers), Westminster has already delivered a truckload of shelters this summer to Binghamton, N.Y., to house volunteers helping residents affected by this year's spring floods.

The two truckloads they're working on now will be part of a proactive effort. Ransford said they'll be delivered to a staging area close to the center of the U.S. in Arkansas by Sept. 1—when hurricane season traditionally starts to peak—ready for deployment to wherever they might be needed, with a team from Westminster close behind.

"This time we'll be ready in two days to say 'Go,'" Ransford said.

Assembling the villages in advance also allows church members to get involved who

can't travel to disaster zones. "It really gives church members a chance to put their faith to work in a meaningful way to them," Ransford said. The church charges \$10 per

volunteer per night in hurricane-hit areas, the money paying for room and board—kitchen and bathroom facilities—plus a meal.

A minister starts over in small Utah city

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OGDEN, Utah—Pastor Jimmie Warren had a church and 18 acres near New Orleans. He raised okra, cattle and hogs while tending to the needs of poor people.

Now he and wife Aileen are living in a modest home, 40 miles north of Salt Lake City. He gives nightly Bible lessons, opening the door to anyone who wants hand-clapping gospel music and inspiration.

"I hear the sound of a new breeze," Warren and his guests sing, "marching toward the gates of the enemy."

His "amens" are too numerous to count.

"It was a divine appointment for me to be here," Warren said later. "It's God's will—not Katrina."

He was referring, of course, to the hurricane that destroyed his Holy Way Ministry in St. Bernard Parish. Warren, 57, was in Utah at the time, visiting his sick father, whom he had not seen in 50 years, and watching the disaster on television.

As Louisiana recovers, St. Bernard Parish would seem to be a place that needs someone like Warren preaching hope during an uncertain transition.

Instead, he's starting over in Utah, a black minister in a predominantly white, Mormon state pledging to build a multicultural congregation below the Wasatch mountains.

The owners of a vacant store stepped up and offered their building for a church, rent-free.

"I left New Orleans feeding people, clothing people. I'm going to do the same thing here," Warren promised.

He preaches each night at home, except Friday when he speaks at Emmanuel Church of God in Christ in Ogden.

Some nights the Warrens attract a dozen or more people. On a recent evening, there were only two friends who moved to Oklahoma after the hurricane and were visiting the Warrens.

With gospel music blaring, Warren was on his knees, praying face-down in a chair. He slowly got up to recount the day: a stop at a nursing home, visits with the homeless in a park, more prayer.

"I don't see nobody out there," Warren said, peeking through a curtain to see if there are stragglers. "But God

is here tonight—amen."

He spent an hour explaining that Israel's right to exist is rooted in the Old Testament. Warren concluded with Matthew, chapter 24, in which Jesus predicts famine, earthquakes and wars.

Bible interpretation leads church to dump female Sunday school teacher

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WATERTOWN, N.Y.—The minister of a church that dismissed a female Sunday school teacher after adopting what it called a literal interpretation of the Bible says a woman can perform any job—outside of the church.

The First Baptist Church dismissed Mary Lambert on Aug. 9 with a letter explaining that the church had adopted an interpretation that prohibits women from teaching men. She had taught there for 54 years.

The letter quoted the first epistle to Timothy: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, she must be silent."

The Rev. Timothy LaBouf, who also serves on the Watertown City Council, issued a statement saying his stance against women teaching men in Sunday school would not affect his decisions as a city leader in Watertown, where all five members of the council are men but the city manager who runs the city's day-to-day

operations is a woman.

"I believe that a woman can perform any job and fulfill any responsibility that she desires to," outside of the church, LaBouf wrote Saturday.

Mayor Jeffrey Graham, however, was bothered by the reasons given Lambert's dismissal.

"If what's said in that letter reflects the councilman's views, those are disturbing remarks in this day and age," Graham said. "Maybe they wouldn't have been disturbing 500 years ago, but they are now."

Lambert has publicly criticized the decision, but the church did not publicly address the matter until Saturday, a day after its board met.

In a statement, the board said other issues were behind Lambert's dismissal, but it did not say what they were.

Historian says: Slavery created a biblical crisis for America, church

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Human slavery, America's original sin, developed into a moral crisis, culminating in a Civil War that cost 518,333 lives. That exceeds the deaths in every other U.S. war, from the Revolution through Iraq.

Slavery also damaged the nation's religious underpinnings and the Bible's authority, says Mark A. Noll in "The Civil War as a Theological Crisis" (University of North Carolina Press). Noll is a leading evangelical Protestant historian.

Noll's theme: America was built upon the Bible as the sole moral authority. But slavery caused "an unbridgeable chasm of opinion" about what the Bible meant. Devout Bible believers reached starkly different conclusions, which undermined assurance that

the Bible gives clear guidance readily available to all.

That's a pertinent point in 2006 as the Religious Left and Religious Right dispute what the Bible says about, say, abortion and gay rights.

The conflict about Scripture before the Civil War was "politically, socially, morally and culturally—as well as religiously—explosive," Noll writes.

"The Book that made the nation was destroying the nation; the nation that had taken to the Book was rescued not by the Book but by force of arms," Noll remarks that it was left to theologians named Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman to decide what the Bible meant.

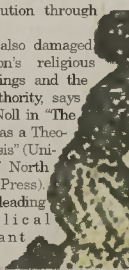
America in 1860 was hugely pious. One-third to two-fifths of Americans were formal church members and those

participating without membership doubled the total, the opposite of 2006 when little more than half of those on church rolls regularly attend worship.

In 1860, the income of the nation's churches and related organizations was near the total federal government receipts, compared with today's roughly 25-1 ratio of federal income to religious contributions.

Protestants dominated, operating 95 percent (50,000) of the nation's churches, and were heavily evangelical. "Only because they were so important religiously did the churches also become so important politically," says Noll. The same could be said with 21st-century evangelicals.

Evangelical culture had "implicit trust that the Bible was a plain book whose authoritative deliverances could be apprehended by anyone who simply opened the covers and read."



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The Charlotte – Mecklenburg NAACP will again host the annual Ashanti Awards and Scholarship Celebration on September 15 and 16. The weekend will start with the Ashanti Golf Challenge at Highland Creek Golf Club on Friday, September 15 and culminate with the award celebration on Saturday starting at 6pm at the beautiful Westin Hotel in downtown Charlotte, NC.

This year, Mel Watt, U.S. Congressman will receive the Meritorious Public Service Award. Public Service Awards will also be bestowed upon NC State Representatives Becky Carney and Beverly Earle. The Hall of Fame Award recipient will be Mecklenburg School Board member George Dunlap. Our corporate sponsor this year, Bank of America will receive the Corporation of the Year Award. The 2006 scholarship recipient will be G.K. Moss, Jr of Sun Valley High school.

Kenneth White, President of the Charlotte Branch said this is the premier annual event of the year for the branch. A fabulous Silent Auction attracts many attendees to bid on a vast array of art work, crafts, fine jewelry, hats and other wonderful items.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its half million members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in public and private sectors.

Golf green fees are \$100.00 per person with several sponsorship levels available that include green fees. Please send golf checks to NAACP, PO Box 480540 Charlotte, NC 28269, att: Kenneth White. Call 704-517-1877 for additional information.

Ashanti Awards celebration tickets are \$75.00 each. Please make checks payable to NAACP, P.O. Box 25774, Charlotte, NC 28229, Att: Yvonne Pettis, Ashanti Chairperson.

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