

Religion

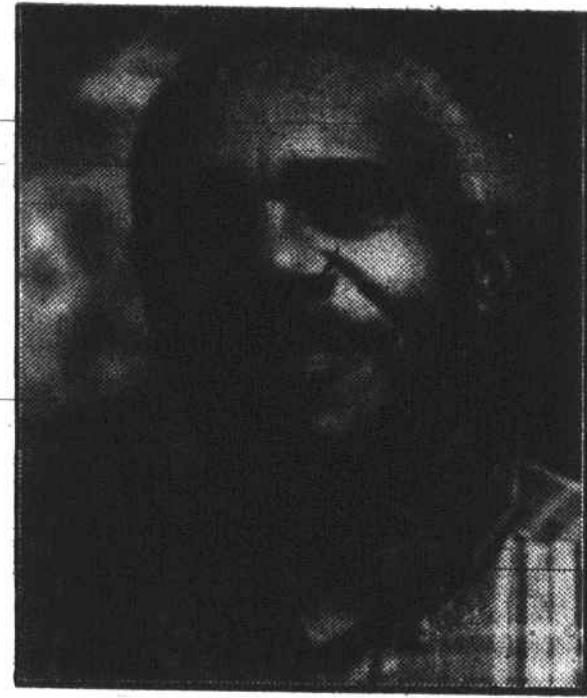
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Construction underway on new St. Stephen Baptist building

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

St. Stephen Baptist Church is beginning the new decade with an eye toward moving into a new church facility.

The congregation held a ground-breaking ceremony Dec. 16 at the new site on the corner of Noble and Pressman streets. The church's pastor said that the construction of the new building is the result of years of planning and hard work on the part of his congregation. He said also that he considers it a milestone in the church's history.



L.C. Rucker

"This is a tremendous thing," said the Rev. J.R. Samuels. "It's the second church we're planning to build. God has blessed us with this. It's a miracle and I am just so happy about the whole thing."

St. Stephen Baptist Church began in 1935 as a church group that first held worship services in a six-room, frame house on the corner of Tenth and Hickory streets. J.W. Dunlap and A.H. Howard contacted officers of the Pastor's Aid and requested money to rent the building for services. A call meeting resulted in the enrollment of 16 members who later accepted the name of St. Stephen Baptist Church, which was proposed by the Rev. L. Hines, who pastored until his death in 1947. The first one and a half years of his pastorate was without pay.

In 1937, the church moved to a new location on 11th and Hickory streets and membership grew to more than 300 people.

After Rev. Hines' death, the Rev. E.G. Williams of South Boston, Va., was called to pastor the church. Under his pastorate, another site was purchased on Ogburn Street in 1949 and the membership grew to 500.

In 1956, the Rev. C. M. Freeman was called to pastor St. Stephen and he served until 1958. The church's current pastor, Rev. Samuels, came to the church in 1958. The church was built on its current site on Bowen Boulevard five years after Rev. Samuel arrived. Its mortgage was burned in 1972 and the church received its charter from the state of North Carolina in 1975.

Rev. Samuels praised the efforts of the members of his church in making St. Stephen's next move possible.

"This new building represents the creativity, vision, hard work and faith of the people in the church," he said. "It's such an outstanding thing and really, I'm just carried away with it."

The new St. Stephen Baptist Church facility will be located on an eight and one-half acre site just a mile and a half from its present location. Lawrence C. Rucker, chair of the church's Trustee Board, said that construction on the new church facility is expected to be completed by February 1991. He said also that the ground-breaking ceremonies held last month represent the final step toward realizing a dream that the congregation has had for many years.

"This has been in progress for the last 10 years," Mr. Rucker said. "We were going to hold on to where we are now and just build on to it. But we couldn't get a parking facility, and the land we thought we could get across the street, we finally found out we wouldn't be able to get. So we decided to go on and build a whole new building."

He said that the congregation was fortunate that it already owned the land on Noble and Pressman, which eliminated one of the obstacles it could have faced in beginning the construction project.

"It wasn't hard for us because we already had land purchased over on Noble. The hardest part came with us making up our minds to go ahead and do it," he said.



Grand Groundbreaking

Above, deacons George Sims, George Jenkins and Oscar Robinson, join St. Stephen's pastor, the Rev. J.R. Samuels, for ground-breaking ceremonies at the future site of their new church facility. At left, members of the congregation brave the chilly temperatures to participate in the activities.

Photos by L.C. Rucker

"It was an on-and-off project for long time. It's been on and off for the last six years. We would decide to build it and then we'd decide not to. But now, everybody loves the idea. We needed more educational facilities and more parking facilities and we'll have that with this new building. We had just about outgrown the building we have now." Mr. Rucker said the new building will seat more than 1,000 people.

CHURCH CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JAN. 13

• St. Peter's World Outreach Center will give away clothes and food to the needy from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The church is located at 1031 N. Highland Ave. For more information call 722-2285. Elder J.C. Hash is host pastor.

SUNDAY, JAN. 14

• The Gospel Emotions will be in concert at Mount Glory Baptist Church, 214 N. Dunleith Ave., at 4 p.m. The Mount Glory Young Adult Choir and the Disciples of Faith Gospel Singers also will perform. The Rev. J.B. Morrison is host pastor.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

• St. Peter's World Outreach Center, 1031 N. Highland Ave., will hold its prayer and healing school, meeting the needs of the whole man, spirit, soul and body, Tuesdays and Thursdays, beginning with intercessory prayer from noon to 12:30 p.m. Healing school services begin at 12:30 p.m. Services also will be held every second Sunday at 6 p.m.

• St. Peter's World Outreach Center will present the "Single Lights," a program designed specifically to address issues confronting single people and single parents. The "Single Lights" meets each second and third Sunday at 6 p.m. There also will be monthly or bimonthly fellowship activities. The program is an extension of St. Peter's World Outreach Center, located at 1031 N. Highland Ave. Elder J.C. Hash is host pastor. For more information call 722-2285.

• Pitts Memorial Missionary Baptist Church will hold weekly prayer services every Tuesday night at 7 and Bible study classes every Thursday night at 7. The teacher for the Bible study classes is the Rev. Henry Massey of Morning Star Baptist Church. Dr. B.H. Bonham Sr. is host pastor. For more information call 784-5737.

• The Saints Home Day Care Center is now accepting applications for children, ages 2 to 5. The day care center is state-licensed and certified. Hours of operation are 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. For more information call Mary Bitting at 721-1969.

• The St. Phillips Day Care Center is now accepting applications for the ages 2 to 5. The day care center is state-licensed and certified. Hours of operation are 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. For more information call Linda Wright 723-5270.

• There will be a free medical clinic operated by doctors from Bowman Gray and nurses from the Public Health Department held at First Baptist Church at Fifth and Spruce streets on the first Tuesday of each month. Private physicians also operate a free clinic held at Trinity

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Police stand guard at NAACP New Year's Day services

By MARC RICE
Associated Press Writer

ATLANTA -- With police standing guard outside, about 200 people attending an NAACP church program Monday offered prayer, song and humor in the face of threats issued on the heels of a recent series of mail bombings.

The New Year's Day program at a southwest Atlanta church began after a search by agents from the FBI, Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Atlanta police, including bomb-sniffing dogs. No explosives were found.

The annual NAACP program commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation was one of several held across the nation, but attracted special attention because Atlanta is the center of an investigation of bombings that last month killed a federal judge and an attorney.

The FBI refused Monday to comment on the progress of the investi-

gation. A letter to an Atlanta television station, disclosed last Thursday, claimed responsibility for the bombs and threatened to kill two NAACP members.

Narvis Grier, the former longtime executive secretary of the Atlanta NAACP, said threats of violence always have been a part of the organization's history.

"The NAACP is the oldest, the largest, the most hated and the most respected civil rights organization," she told the gathering at Hoosier United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Richard Wynn, pastor of Hoosier, said some people who might normally attend "Emancipation Day" events called him Monday morning to say they would not be coming this year because of the threats. The crowd in attendance, though wildly enthusiastic in their response to the program, did not fill the church.

"In light of what has happened, it

was an appropriate turnout," Wynn said after the program.

Killed in last month's bombings were 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Robert Vance and Robert Robinson of Savannah, a

"The NAACP is the oldest, the largest, the most hated and the most respected civil rights organization."

-- Narvis Grier

black lawyer who worked with the NAACP.

Two other bombs -- one to a federal courthouse in Atlanta and one to an NAACP office in Jacksonville, Fla. -- were intercepted before they could explode.

The Atlanta police sent four patrol cars with officers to stand guard outside the church during the 3 1/2-hour service, which included a ser-

mon, hymns by the Wheat Street Baptist Church Choir and speeches, most of which made reference to the bombings.

Dr. Otis W. Smith, president of the Atlanta NAACP chapter, said Monday morning's search was done as a precaution rather than in response to a specific threat.

"They assured us everything was all right before we came in," Smith said.

From the pulpit, Wynn asked for prayers for the "sick minds and twisted spirit" responsible for the recent violence. He and other speakers vowed there would be no intimidation.

Monday's program marked the anniversary of the date in 1863 when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect. President Abraham Lincoln issued the proclamation the previous year to free slaves in states then at war with the Union.

Texas to investigate racial motive in fire at black church

RED OAK, Texas (AP) -- The state fire marshal and Ellis County law officers are investigating a suspicious fire and neo-Nazi graffiti at a small church with an all-black congregation in a Dallas suburb.

The pastor of Cedar Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Red Oak, who found five swastikas drawn on church property after the Christmas Eve blaze, told The Dallas Morning News he thinks the damage was racially motivated.

The Rev. S.E. Shead, who has been pastor for 17 years, also said the church has been badly damaged and the small congregation can't pay to have it fixed.

"I'm begging for any help I could get to help repair the building," Shead said. "We can't afford to do it on our own."

He said church members found the swastikas Tuesday while surveying the damage. The symbols were found on a portable sign in front of the building, on a propane tank near where the fire began and on the front steps.

The symbols weren't there when church members left Sunday afternoon after Christmas Eve services, Shead said.

Four investigators with the Ellis County Sheriff's Department have studied the symbols and searched

the church grounds and burned pews for clues to the fire.

Authorities are trying to determine whether the fire and graffiti are connected.

Investigator Jeff Bryant said the symbols aren't correct depictions of the Nazi swastika. "They are not the pattern of an educated neo-Nazi," he said.

The information gathered by the sheriff's department will be turned over to the state fire marshal's office, Bryant said.

Bryant said the fire started outside and seems to have been deliberately set. It burned about a quarter of the church's pews and caused about

\$15,000 in damage.

"It appears to us to be arson. We are trying to determine what kind of accelerant was used," he said.

Red Oak is in a sparsely populated area near Waxahachie, which is about 40 miles south of Dallas.

Ellis County residents who live near the church said they were surprised to learn that someone might have set the fire and that swastikas were painted on the property.

"That's horrible, absolutely horrible," said Julie Brown, who has lived near the church for 10 years. She said she hasn't heard of any racial incidents in the neighborhood.

'A Different World' star encourages youth to avoid temptations of drug abuse

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP) -- Comedian and actor Binbad told 100 underprivileged youths last week they could succeed through hard work, confidence and a good education despite the negative influences of drugs and crime that surround them.

"A lot of you may not know how much you have to offer, how important you are," the actor who plays Walter on the TV series "A Different World" said. "I'm here to tell you, you can do anything you want to. But not if you're dead or in jail." Binbad was in town for a perfor-

mance at the Midland Theater, but he made a special appearance at the YMCA Youth Extension Center.

The actor said that speaking in black communities was a way for him to give back some of what he's learned to youngsters who are in need of role models.

"There's something happening in the community that is very tragic," he said. "We have brothers killing brothers, right in our own neighborhood, and over what? Dope, drugs."

He also told the youths, "I don't drink and I don't hide the fact that I don't."