

# HOLY ALLIANCE

*Initiative strives to pair each WS/FC school with a local church*

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

More than a dozen Triad churches have signed on to take part in an ambitious project.

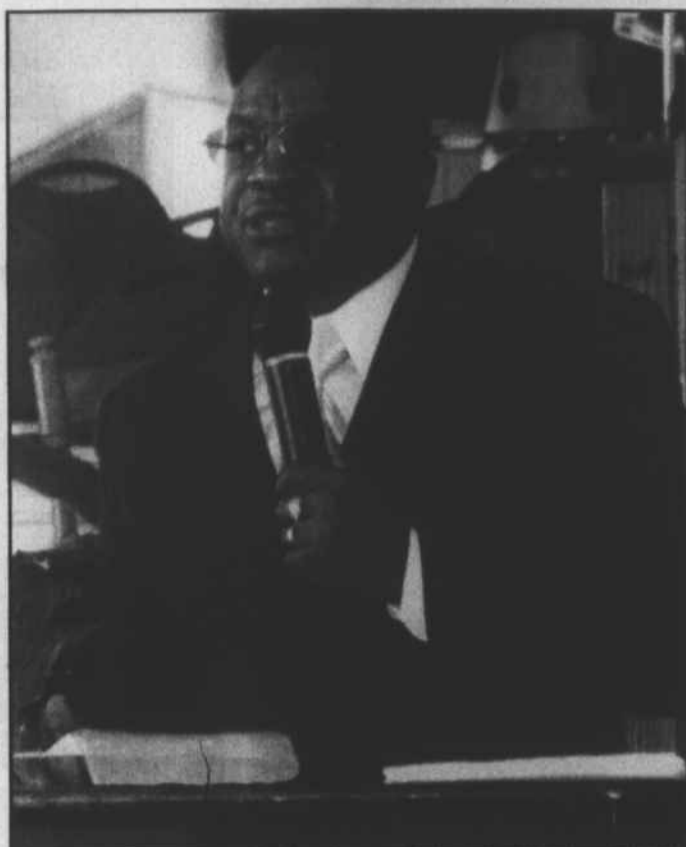
The "100 Faith Communities to Adopt 100 Schools Initiative" was announced this week. It is an unprecedented effort to pair every single school in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County system with a church or faith-based organization. The project, which is slated to begin during the 2012-13 school year, is being spearheaded by the Goler Outreach Association, Inc., in collaboration with community partners such as Operation Will Power, which is also based at Goler Memorial AME Zion Church, explained Rev. Dr. Seth Lartey, the church's pastor.

"We are extremely concerned that, unless something is done, that we could all stand the risk of not having public schools that are functional and effective," he said. "We think that if we can get the faith community involved, then we can do a significant amount of work here in Forsyth County."

Volunteers from each church will pick up designated groups of children from their assigned school each week and take them to their church for an hourlong session that will focus on spirituality and character education. The Initiative is an expansion of Religious Education Released Time Program, a partnership between Goler and three local schools that served 200 students over the course of its seven-year run. Lartey said he started the Religious Education Program a decade ago after learning about a Supreme Court ruling.

"Fifty years ago, the Supreme Court of the United States said that it was legal for a faith community to go into a public school with the permission of the parents, bring children into the church and teach them ethical values and spirituality," he explained. "...We experimented with it (through the Religious Education Program) and saw the results and now we want to expand it."

Lartey says the local community has embraced the project, which will also be offered at select Guilford



File Photos  
Goler Memorial AME Zion Church Pastor Seth O. Lartey (left) believes that the influences of area churches can have a positive impact on the lives of young people.



Dr. Thomas

County schools.

"I feel real, real good about it simply because of the reaction that we have gotten from the ministers that we've spoken to," he remarked. "We feel real good about the opportunity to turn the schools around."

St. John CME Church is among the faith communities that have committed themselves to the project.

"I am just alarmed at the number of dropouts and I feel that the church is an avenue that can support our children, spiritually and in other ways," said St. John's pastor, Rev. Dr. Edward Thomas. "School can be tough for some kids, and I think that's part of why the church exists. The church should be a partner of the community in which it serves."

Thomas said he expects an enthusiastic response from his congregation, which is home to a healthy population of retired educators. He added that he hopes

other faith communities will also recognize the importance of the program.

"Children are our greatest asset," said the grandfather of 12. "If our children are not educated, our community is going to be lost."

Lartey said he hopes the program - which will be funded in part from Operation Will Power's "I'm Free" bottled water sales - will continue indefinitely.

"As long as we have problems in the schools and the churches are willing to work and the community rises to the occasion, we believe that this should continue always," he said.

For more information about the 100 Faith Communities project, contact Lartey at 918-4994 or 724-9411.



Rep. Larry Womble

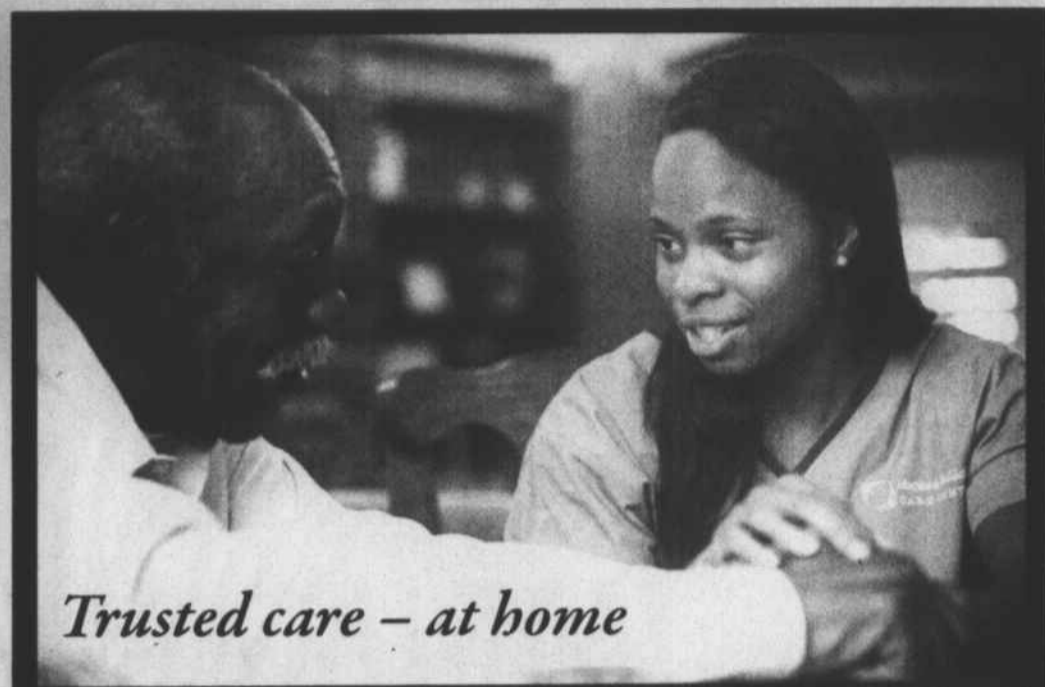
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