

Rev. Graves Is The First Black Minister At First United

By LORA VANDERHALL
Lifestyles Editor

Rev. James Graves is the first black minister in North Carolina to become an assistant pastor to a predominately white congregation, in the United Methodist denomination.

He is assistant pastor at First United Methodist Church, 501 N. Tryon Street.

Graves, who is into his second year as an assistant pastor, is a warm and modest man who came from a humble beginning.

Growing up in Jamestown, North Carolina, which is between High Point and Greensboro, Graves had his share of growing pains.

"When I was in the ninth grade I dropped out of school. I joined the army for three years with one year of that time in Vietnam," said Graves.

"After that I developed a real interest in helping people."

Graves realized the need to complete his high school education so he obtained a GED. Soon after this he was hired by the Guilford County Sheriff's Department where he was a deputy sheriff for five years.

"While working with the sheriff's department I became interested in the plight of the homeless," he added.

Graves worked for the High Point Police Department for three years, during the last year he started working toward becoming a minister.

He entered A & T State University and received a degree in so-

ciology. In December 1987, he received his masters degree from Southeastern Theological Seminary in Wake Forest.

Graves is currently making plans to pursue a doctorate degree.

His first full time appointment in the ministry was here, at First United Methodist Church.

Dr. Harold Bales, Senior Minister at First United Methodist, says they did an extensive search before finding Rev. Graves.

"We were very deliberate in our selection of him. Rev. Graves is a splendid colleague and he is greatly loved by all who know him. His gentle spirit and quiet manner belie the pioneer nature of his ministry," said Bales.

Bales says, that Graves was selected because of his spirit, personality, life experiences and his devotion to working with the street people.

Graves said that when he first found out that he had been selected, his thoughts were more focused on the fact that the position would give him a unique opportunity to minister to homeless people.

The church has an active ministry with the Uptown Day Shelter.

"The fact that the church has a predominately white congregation was incidental. I had a real desire to minister to the street people," said Graves.

First United has a congregation of over 1400 persons. Only



Dr. Harold Bales (r), senior pastor at First United Methodist Church, is shown above with Rev. James Graves, (l) one of the as-

istant ministers at First United Methodist.

Photo/CALVIN FERGUSON

ten of the 1400, which includes Rev. Graves' family, are black.

"This is a great opportunity for me. People are individuals and you should accept them for who...and what they are and try to help them. There is not a point from which you can't fall," said Graves.

Besides serving as chaplain

for the Day Shelter, he assists in the Sunday morning worship service, teaches a ministers Sunday School class and other pastoral duties.

"We have a warm congregation and they have been affirming, supportive and accepting," he said.

"But I do get homesick some-

times. Those old gospels and spirituals are still ringing deep in my heart."

Graves, 41, says that moving to a city this size was a major adjustment for him and his family. He and his wife, Mae, have four children: Kevin, 20, John, 19, Tracy, 17, and Samantha, 13.

Graves is active in community activities such as the Westside Advocacy Group and the Human Rights Committee at Metro School.

"I have really been enriched because of this rare opportunity and I just want to go on and be the best minister I can be," Graves concluded.

Seversville Partners Opens A New Office At Clinton Chapel



Photo/CALVIN FERGUSON

Ron Ross (l), program director of Seversville Partners, Inc., talks with Chris Simpkins (c),

president of the Seversville Community Organization and Hannah Cureton (r), vice president.

By LORA VANDERHALL
Lifestyles Editor

Seversville Partners, a church-sponsored program to address the root problems of families in the Seversville neighborhood, will have an open house in its newly renovated office at Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church on Sunday, January 15 from 12 noon until 4 p.m.

The office is located in the education area of Clinton Chapel, 1901 Rozzelle's Ferry Road.

Over a ten year period the Seversville Partners, with the involvement and participation of Seversville families have committed themselves to improving the community.

There are five churches from the Catawba/Mecklenburg Presbyteries that initiated the program, however there are not any presbyterian churches in the Seversville Community.

The churches that make up the organization includes: C. N. Jenkins Memorial Presbyterian Church, Covenant Presbyterian

Church, First United Presbyterian Church, Grier Heights Presbyterian Church and Statesville Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Clinton Chapel and James Tabernacle recently became associated churches.

The main areas of concern for the group are: support and encouragement of the Seversville Community Organization, neighborhood cleanup and continued maintenance, employment and underemployment, individual counselling with an emphasis on youth issues, crime and education.

The office of the program director, Ron Ross, will be located in the new office space.

"The office was renovated by some of the residents and it is the first structural change that we've made so far," said Ross.

Rev. Retoy Gaston, pastor of Clinton Chapel, says the space was donated because it is important that a program of this type stay in the community.

"I think that during this day

and age the church can best serve the community around them. We feel that it is important to keep the people in the community informed about services that are available to them," said Gaston.

One of the primary goals of the Seversville Partners is to focus on existing resources in the community and to utilize those agencies.

"Our objective is to help the residents of Seversville learn to do for themselves," said Ross.

The organization has made some progress within its first year.

"We had a major cleanup effort last May and it was very successful. We offered workshops and retreats for the youth. And we also have a study and story hour every Tuesday and Wednesday at Bruns Avenue School," said Ross.

"Seversville has a tremendous amount of potential," he added.

Black Farmers: A Disappearing Group In Mecklenburg County

By M.L.LaNeY
Post Staff Writer

There is an endangered species that has just about run into the status of being defunct.

Black farmers in Mecklenburg County are scarcer than hen's teeth. The situation of farmers overall has degenerated by virtue of factors such as economic and social history.

But the position of the black farmer is precarious to say the least. The south, in particular, has not been kind to its black citizens on the farm.

The high price of land, the development of technology and the assault on land usage have combined to displace traditional farm workers.

More and more, big business has encroached on the markets that had been the source of livelihoods for small black farmers. North Carolina's lingering legacy of sharecropping is a leftover from the plantation system.

It exploited the vulnerable position of small landowners and made it virtually impossible for Black farmers to adequately face the challenge of increased mechanization, and industrialization of farming methods.

In Mecklenburg County there are only four Black farmers, who actively pursue farming on a full-time basis.

But none of these four is involved with the production of cash crops. Mostly, farming done by Blacks in the county are small-scale operations by retired persons.

The crops produced go to local



Photo/LaNEY

The tobacco harvester was once a very important asset. Today black farmers are leaving the

farm in droves. Tomorrow black farms may be just a memory.

farmer's markets and are important as supplemental income for the elderly. Historically, cotton was the most important crop for black farmers, with tobacco a close second.

Regionally, cotton has always been more important in the western part of the state than in the eastern section, where tobacco was preminent.

The boll weevil devastated Black farmers in the early '20s and helped give impetus to the mass immigration of Blacks away from the farm.

Just as many Blacks found life on the farm secure and familiar, and so they made up their minds to stay.

Today, even these few holdouts are being forced into other modes of living. Black farms are being lost at the rate of one every minute.

Though this figure specifically applies to the national level, it is easy to understand the implications for the county.

The annual rate of decline for Black farmers is 9.7 per cent as compared to 3.9 per cent for

whites. The national average is 4.6 per cent. The type of involvement presents a sharp contrast as well.

For example, 61 per cent of the white Americans who farmed did so as land owners, working in their own interest. Only 27 per cent of Blacks were so self-employed, whereas 62 per cent worked in agriculture as laborers for salaries.

In a recent year, more than two-thirds of all Black farmers ended the farm year in debt. Studies done regarding farm

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family diets indicate that nearly 25 per cent of Black farm families rarely ate fresh meat.

Another statistic shows only 2.6 per cent have ever had a tooth filled. Although there are numerous federal programs designed to help farmers such as the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) and the Farmers Home Association (FHA) and the Federal Extension Service, most do not reach Black farmers.

According to THE EBONY HANDBOOK, 97 per cent of Black farmers asked said, "they had never received any help from their ASCS county committee."

Statistical data taken from a report submitted by the Southern Rural Research Project (SRRP) has already prophesized the demise of Blacks as farmers. The report shows that more than 92 per cent of the farmers asked said that they are called by their first names by the representatives of these agencies.

But, "frequently," the report comments, "after spending a full day at the farm office, away from the work at the farm, a Black farmer will be told to

come back the next day."

The SRRP report maintains that as result of being mistreated and ignored by those agencies, the Black farmer is "isolated and appallingly uninformed about federal programs and therefore does not participate in them."

Black farmers by a three-to-one margin were unaware of FHA loans available for such concerns as improvement of soil and water conservation.

More than two-thirds did not know about FHA loans for family or farming costs. Thus the programs that are essential to the continued welfare and economic growth of Black farms are not reaching the rural areas where they are needed to safeguard and give impetus to self-sufficiency.

Migration away from the farm continues at an alarming rate. The report concludes that, "The responsibility for change lies with the federal government."

"The President of the United States, who appoints the Secretary of Agriculture himself, who, at best, has shut his eyes or, worst, has sanctioned the extinction of the Black farmer... throughout the South."