

12A

## RELIGION

## Ministers preaches gospel to Generation X

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALLENTOWN, Pa. — The Rev. Sammy Rodriguez Jr. stood at center stage in the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Allentown, microphone in hand, moussed hair and boyish face shiny with sweat, and exhorted 846 Latino teenagers and young adults to evangelize.

Drive into Pemberton or Cumberland Gardens housing projects at midnight or 1 a.m., he said.

Drive right up to people sell-

ing drugs. Roll down the window. Stretch out your hands in prayer. Urge the dealers to give up drugs.

"We need to fight physical violence with spiritual violence," Rodriguez, 26, implored during the second annual Pentecostal Youth Congress on the night before Easter. "If they take out their 9mm Beretta, we take out our 66mm King James Bible."

The crowd roared its approval.

Rodriguez Liberty High School teacher, Whitehall res-

ident and ordained minister of the Assemblies of God is a rising young preacher of the Pentecostal church's Generation X.

He had just pumped up the young Latinos, taken them to another level of spiritual and emotional rapture, just when it seemed they could go no higher.

Rodriguez seized the moment like a starving man grabs bread, driving home the message with a style that mixed Jesse Jackson cadences with "gangsta rap" images.

Nothing can put out the fire of the Holy Spirit, he preached, speaking alternately in Spanish and English. But Christianity isn't easy, he said. Many let the fire go out.

"When the fire flows out, it hurts, it purifies," he warned.

Rodriguez invited the teens and 20-somethings to come forward if they were in need of prayer.

Dozens rushed from the rows of auditorium seats and pressed against the stage like fans at a rock concert. Ministers waded into the

crowd, putting their hands on heads and praying briefly before moving to the next person. Many of those prayed over collapsed onto the red-carpeted floor or went into spiritual spasms a manifestation, Pentecostals believe, of the Holy Spirit's presence.

"Let the fire come down," Rodriguez screamed as the entire auditorium gyrated to Latin-beat music.

"It feels so good," said Jannelis Sanjurjo, 16, of Allentown, who had collapsed to the floor in her navy blue

skirt and long-sleeved white blouse. "When I have problems, I feel he lifts me up."

Rodriguez was born in Newark, N.J., to parents who had immigrated from Puerto Rico in the early 1960s. His father, whom Rodriguez described as an "old-fashioned traditional American" and his prime inspiration, moved the family to the Lehigh Valley so he could work on the assembly line at Mack Trucks Co. The family spoke Spanish, but Rodriguez could only under-

See MINISTER page 13A

## Sunday school lesson

## Stand firm at task assigned by God

Devotional Reading:  
Hebrews 12:1-11

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah  
50:1-11

Our world is full of fleeing people. Rather than face life's challenges and endure life's hardships they run from them. "Move on" is their motto — to a new school, new job, a new town, a new "life."

In striking contrast to this fleeing spirit stand the strong words of Nehemiah, the wall builder of old Jerusalem: "Should such a man as I flee?" (Nehemiah 6:11). These words were offered in response to a threat raised against him by the enemies of God's people. Wanting no strong Jerusalem they resisted all of his efforts to reconstruct its walls. Refusing to be distracted by their interruptions or deterred by their opposition, Nehemiah remained true to his calling and completed the task that God assigned him. Aware of who he was and, more importantly, of who God was, Nehemiah simply refused to quit.

This same spirit of faithful devotion to God's calling was displayed by the servant of the Lord in today's text. In spite of rejection and persecution, the servant was determined to see his task through to the end God desired.

The third of the four "Servant Songs" of Isaiah is the subject of this lesson. Though the speaker in this song is not identified, the language and context suggest that he is the "servant" of the previous two songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6). As noted in the two previous lessons, there is some debate over who the servant is in these texts. The broader context of Isaiah 40-55 favors an interpretation that the title "servant" refers to the nation of Israel (see 41:8, 44:2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3) or, more particularly, to that generation of penitent Judean exiles who obediently endured the suffering of the Babylonian captivity and became the faithful remnant from whom God would rebuild His nation (see Isaiah 10:20-22). This particular song begins to explore the servant's faithfulness to his calling in spite of persecution from those who opposed him.

Shopping for greeting cards can take a long time. One reason is that many cards make interesting reading; more important, however, searching for just the right verse or sentiment to fit the recipient and the occasion deserves careful consideration. And that translates into time.

Saying the right words to the right person at the right time is a gift. Friends with that kind of intuition and ini-

See SUNDAY page 13A



## Black churches form economic coalition

By Brian Witte  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Five black religious groups unveiled a new company Monday that will pool the purchasing power of black consumers to give them greater access to a wide variety of goods and services.

Leaders of the for-profit company, Revelation Corp. of America, said the aim is to

help black consumers acquire home mortgage loans, life and auto insurance, food products and durable goods.

E. Edward Jones, of the National Baptist Convention of America Inc. and head of the new corporation, called the company "a mechanism to bring economic empowerment and development to the black community through the leadership of the black church."

Revelation, based in Memphis, Tenn., hopes to reach 20 million members in 43,000 churches nationwide. Backers hoped to have Revelation up and running before spring.

Members of the five denominations will be able to buy products from businesses that will be chosen by Revelation Corp. Other groups also can take part in the program.

The companies will offer rebates in bids to have "product exclusivity" with the members of Revelation Corp., said John Lowery, executive vice president of Revelation and president of Lowery-Riggan Co., which owns 30 percent of

the new venture.

"Rather than purchasing everyone's green bean in a grocery store, we will purchase a specific green bean based on the discount for the consumer and rebate back to our organization," Lowery said.

Members will be able to call an 800 number and make purchases through a catalog. Thirty percent of the rebate of each purchase will go to the church's community, Lowery said, and the rest to a nationwide housing fund for minority neighborhoods.

The five denominations that formed the company are the African Methodist Episcopal

Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, National Baptist Convention of America Inc., National Baptist Convention USA Inc. and Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.



## Eye on Gospel

**Swan song?** With four Stellar Awards for his current release, "Show Up!" the star-studded night at the 11th Annual Stellar Awards belonged to John P. Kee, but the 33-year old recording artist who is also the director and founder of the New Life Community Choir, now says the project was more on the lines of his swan song.

"New Life is getting older now," declares Kee. "We can't run like we used to, so we're doing one more project and it should be the last album for New Life Community Choir. We'll stay in the industry in some other areas." I think I'm going to focus more on bringing new artists in.

For the moment, Kee is producing some of the cuts for the forthcoming debut release of Malaco's Bryan Wilson, a 13-year-old child prodigy who has garnered a great deal of attention from gospel insiders over the last two years. Kee is more than honest about his disappointment in the performance of the latest release from Vanessa Bell-Armstrong, "The Secret Is Out" which he produced, attributing part of its poor showing in the marketplace to bad timing.

"However," he says, "I'm not blown away by it. I think it's going to work out." Plans regarding his own solo career are pretty much up in the air, but Kee's not entirely ruling out

another solo recording. "As of right now," he reports, "I just really want to focus in on the church and my marriage. We've built a wonderful home. My kids aged 12 and 11, are growing, and we're all real happy."

The singer/producer was quietly wed on Dec. 23 to longtime girlfriend Felice Sampson. The couple is now in the midst of building a church on some recently acquired land in his home base of Charlotte where he intends to preach. But for all of Kee's retirement plans, next month Varsity Records is set to release, "Stand For Holiness," the latest project from his Victory in Praise Seminar Choir. A concept video was shot on New Year's day.

**Switching gears:** Having established himself in the gospel music scene, dynamic newcomer William Beeton — whose debut album just recently earned him two Stellar Awards — is turning his energies to producing. It is a move that he thinks should come as little surprise to few.

"William Beeton is a producer, arranger, secondary singer," he reveals. "That is what I am. Intersound signed a writer-producer. 'Broken' was done on my own personal record label, WEB Records. My singers were all signed to my company. My vision is doing projects for them." The next project, however, will be his own. Four songs are already completed. The pro-

ject is due in August.

Briefly: Darryl Coley, who just finished work as one of the producers on Lawrence Matthews' forthcoming project from GospelCentric, is now prepping for album number six. The project, marking his last contractual effort for Sparrow, will be recorded (and videotaped) live in Nashville on Feb. 15. The session will double as the opener for Bobby Jones' Annual Gospel Explosion, Feb. 15-17 at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center. And Witness just completed their seventh project, "A Song In The Night," which is being slated for a spring release on CGI Records.