

Battle

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within church guidelines by securing the approval of the elders. He said he was coming to the aid of a loyal church member in trouble when he gave the money to help repay her debt to the bank. The bank then agreed to her early release.

The entire matter came to light in a Charlotte Observer article two weeks ago.

Some AME Zion Church members and pastors, like Rev. Jewett Walker of Charlotte, who pastors a S.C. congregation, refused to com-

ment. Walker said he only knew what he read. "I don't know enough about it," Walker said last week. "In a situation like this, you need to know the facts before you comment."

But others have spoken out against Battle and promised to circulate a petition to have him removed from his position over the S.C. district and calling for repayment of the \$100,000.

Battle reportedly may be re-assigned a larger area in western N.C., a move which may have been planned before the controversy arose.

"This is dead wrong," Mia Hefney, a Rock Hill hair dresser and Pineville AME

Zion church steward, was quoted as saying. "To me this is not missionary work. This isn't what our money should be used for."

Hefney was reportedly circulating a petition seeking repayment from Battle of the \$85,000 taken from the S.C. conference based in Rock Hill and the \$15,000 taken from the mission fund of the Palmetto Conference, based in Spartanburg.

"If you are speaking of money coming from missions, you wouldn't have \$100,000," Jennings said. "Mission funds wouldn't grow that big. If you take all AME Zion churches put together, you wouldn't have \$100,000."

A Congress of core neighborhoods

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lems. We found we were having the same problems and were fighting among ourselves for scarce resources. After meeting several times, we decided it would be better to join forces..."

"Neighborhoods should have more say in local government," Fulton said. "Policy should come from the bottom up, rather than top down. We decided we could make that happen by joining forces...those that have money and clout and those that did not have money and clout. We would empower people to take charge of their own plight...get involved in doing things and actually participating in government."

The group held its first annual conference last month, at which issues and how-tos were discussed, along with networking among leaders to discuss common goals.

The Queen City Congress board meets about every two weeks, more often if necessary, while the full body meets quarterly.

"In the last year, we have done some networking or bridge-building is what I call it, getting diverse neighborhoods together and talking about who we are and what it is we want our neighborhoods to provide for us."

"We found most had the same issue - security, crime-free places, good jobs, good schools.

Some look at it from different perspectives and may call it something different, but everybody wants the same thing. There are similarities across racial and boundary lines...though there are some things we have to work through.

Fulton said crime is a major issue and one of the group's achievement is better cooperation with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.

"We have embarked on a strategic planning process with the David division of the police department...to develop a strategic plan for delivering police service to the area.

Congress officials say they don't plan to become a political group, except where issues affecting their neighborhoods are concerned.

"The primary goal is to train the neighborhoods how to take problems to the council by themselves. We will lend support when they go. We are trying to be careful to not become political. We do not want to be political. That doesn't mean we will not take positions on issues that impact the congress as a whole."

Mary Hopper, a member of the county planning commission and a Dilworth community leader, is vice president of the congress.

"Our neighborhoods are not that different," Hopper said.

"Our needs are essentially not that different. We need a good level of service from city and county government."

The congress wants to make sure local officials don't overlook the center-city neighborhoods, while dealing with the exploding growth on the city's fringe and in the uptown area.

"We have focused so much on making sure uptown is looking good, we have not taken care of the neighborhoods that ring uptown," Hopper said. "That can be a blessing or a curse. If people see money going uptown, people say 'I don't want to spend my money up there.'"

Hopper and Fulton said the group is considering seeking a grant to hire a coordinator for the congress, which is not a community development corporation nor an enterprise zone.

"We don't have access to that kind of money," Hopper said.

Ron Morgan, a Dilworth architect and congress organizer, sees the congress as much bigger than just the center-city neighborhoods. Throughout Mecklenburg County and the region, according to Morgan, there are groups with similar goals and needs which could be represented in a grassroots congress. An example would be residents of small towns in Mecklenburg or fringe towns such as Gastonia and Rock Hill, whose concerns would be unique.

Donors needed to save more lives

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memories.

Massey, 46, received a donor liver almost two years ago after sudden acute liver failure.

"I was given two weeks to live," says Massey. "My whole life flashed in front of me. I wondered what I had done so good, or great, to let me stay."

Gibbs, public relations manager for LifeShare, cites the high incidence of high blood pressure and diabetes, both diseases that wreak havoc with the kidneys as reason for the high number of African Americans currently in need of organs. African Americans also tend to be more likely to be misinformed about organ donation.

"African Americans tend to have religious fears and superstitions that make organ donation difficult," said Gibbs.

The fears coupled with misconceptions about the medical procedures involved as well as the distrust that many African Americans harbor for the medical professions has kept many in the community from signing up to be donors, which hurts the estimated 12,000 African Americans awaiting transplants.

"Organ retrieval is done exactly like surgery," Gibbs said. "One incision is made, the organs removed and the body sewn or sutured."

Gibbs, who often talks to families about organ donation, has encountered many questions about organ donation and hopes the new campaign, which features Michael Jordan as official spokesperson, will help educate African Americans and encourage participation in donor programs.

The pressing need for organs have affected many local families, families who have been spared pain and grief by donors.

Massey was put on the liver waiting list and received his organ after only four days.

"They take the sickest ones first," said Massey. "They don't play favorites."

Massey says that he has resumed a full slate

of activities.

"I feel great, he says with a smile. "I play golf, basketball, go fishing."

Massey's wife agrees.

"He's a miracle man," she says.

Malcolm Albritton also knows the dramatic difference that organ donation can make.

Albritton, 41, received a donor liver at the age of 35. Unlike Massey, Albritton spent 13 months on waiting lists.

"It was pretty tough," says Albritton. "I was out of work for over a year. It is depressing."

The hardest part for Albritton were the calls to the hospital.

"They call and tell you have a match. You go to the hospital and go through tissue typing."

Albritton went through that process two times, only to be rejected. He eventually received a match and has returned to normal.

Massey and Albritton now work along with Gibbs to educate other African Americans about organ donation.

According to Gibbs, the most important thing for African Americans is to realize the number of lives that can be saved by one donor and to make the decision along with your family.

"It is not enough to say yes on your license or to have a donor card," says Gibbs. "The hospital still needs written consent from the family."

The written consent releases the body to a team of transplant doctors who will retrieve vital organs. The doctor who signs the death certificate is not allowed to work with the transplant team.

"The first obligation of the medical team is to save lives," says Gibbs. "Black people do get transplants. You don't have to be rich or famous."

Albritton and Massey are proof of that.

"Search the history of it (transplants)" says Massey. "There is nothing wrong with it."

For more information on organ donation, call Debbie Gibbs at (800) 932-0851.

City council delays consolidation vote

It looks like a referendum on the consolidation of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County governments won't be on the November ballot, after all.

Monday, Charlotte's four African American city council members, joined by Lynn Wheeler and Al Rouso, voted to delay a needed council vote until Aug. 26. Even if council

approved a plan at that time, it seems unlikely the referendum could be added to the November ballot. The deadline for any ballot addition is Sept. 3.

African American council members and the community have been cool to outright adamantly opposed to the idea of consolidating the two gov-

ernments, saying it would reduce black political influence.

Ella Scarborough, Malachi Greene, Pat Cannon and Nasif Majeed all voted to delay the consolidation vote. Greene made the motion because council members Don Reid and Tim Sellers were not present Monday night.

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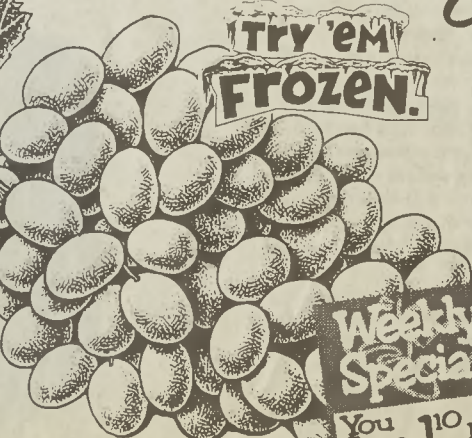
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