

RELIGION

Joyous psalm of praise

Sunday School Lesson

In Yucatan, Mexico, stand the remains of an ancient temple and altar. On this altar a young maiden would be placed; then a priest with a stone knife would rip her heart from her body and hold it aloft, as a sacrifice to the Mayan god.

Archaeologists excavating the ancient city of Carthage in North Africa uncovered hundreds of small urns near a temple to one of the gods. When the excavators opened these urns, they found charred bones of tiny babies. It is quite evident that this was the final resting place for the remains of babies sacrificed in the temple.

We shudder as we realize how brutal many of the ancient religions were. Yet we are forced to give grudging respect to the devotion of these ancient people who were willing to sacrifice their most precious possession, a child, to their gods. Are we equally devoted to Jehovah God? We are not for a moment suggesting that we engage in human sacrifice, but we are insisting that we ought to worship with the same whole-hearted devotion that these ancient pagans did.

The truth is that many of us enter worship rather casually. We go through certain ceremonies in a perfunctory way, or we fail to concentrate on what we are doing. Psalm 96 can be a healthy antidote to some of these weaknesses in our worship.

Psalm 96 is a joyous song of praise and worship of Jehovah. It has none of the soul-wrenching agony of Psalm 51 or the systematic tribute of the law found in Psalm 119. It is a happy song, the type of song one would sing in a worship service. It is longer and more detailed than a contemporary "praise chorus," but is similar in some respects.

Many years ago a man was visiting a small town in eastern Pennsylvania. When Sunday came, he wanted to attend church. The only church in town was that of the Quakers, so he went there.

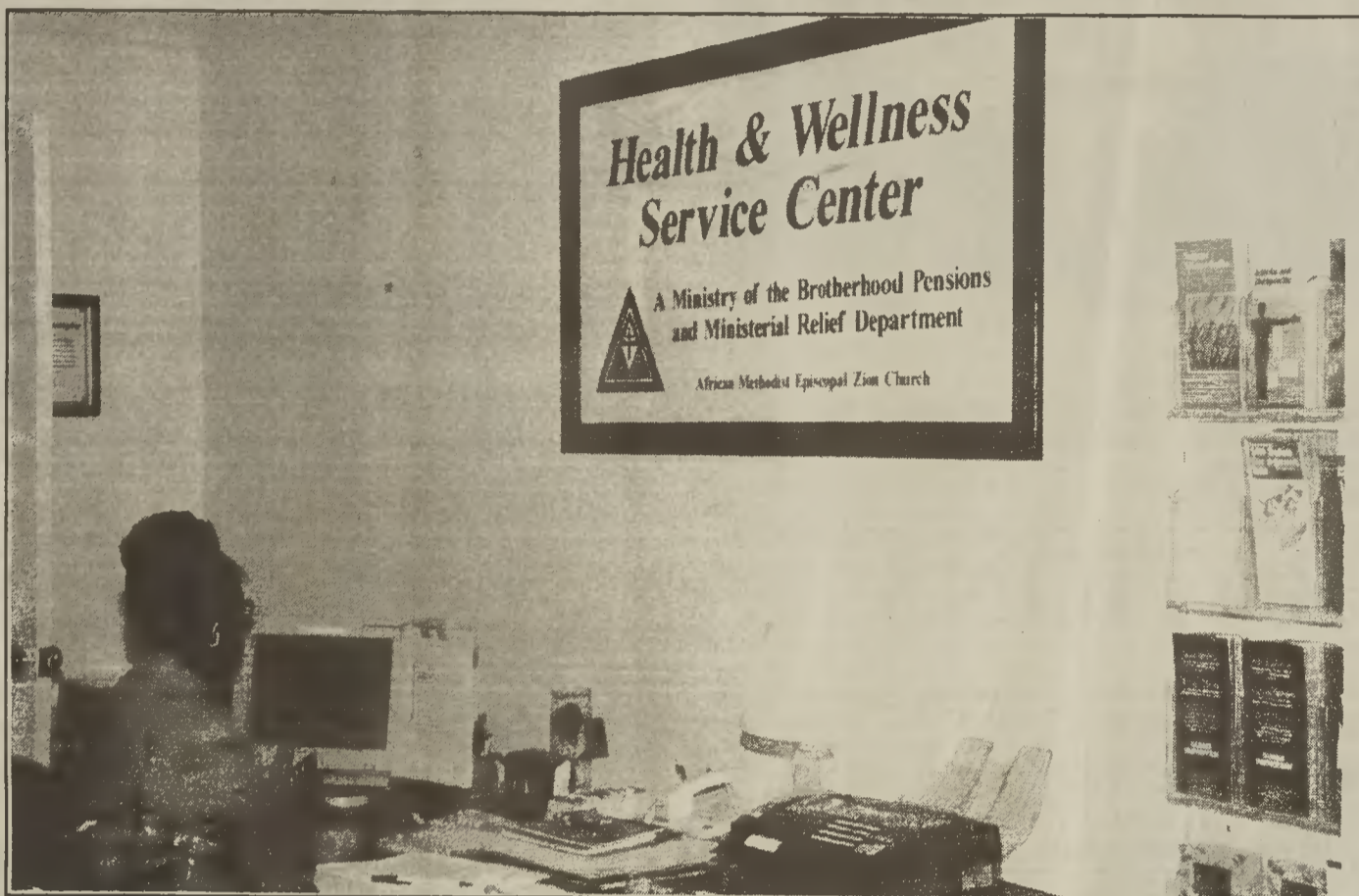
In the old-fashioned Quaker meeting everyone sat quietly until someone was "moved by the Spirit" to speak. The visitor entered the building and sat quietly with the others. After fifteen or twenty minutes no one had spoken. The visitor turned to a man sitting beside him and asked, "When does the service begin?"

"Right after the benediction."

Exactly! Service in the name of God ought to follow worship. If worship does not result in Christian service, then something is lacking in the worship. Psalm 96 envisions a joyous time of worship when the name of God is exalted, but the psalmist is also concerned about what happens when worship ends. Worshippers are told to "declare his glory among the heathen" (v.3), "bring an offering" (v.8), and "say among the heathen that the Lord has reigneth" (v.10).

The mandate for Christian service is not limited to the professional clergy. Each one of us has an obligation to use his or her talents, time and resources to glorify the Lord. Most of us will not be called to serve as missionaries on some distant shore, nor to proclaim the message from the pulpit. However, one may teach a Sunday School class, serve as a nursery attendant, or direct traffic in the church parking lot. We may visit the sick, counsel the discouraged, or share our faith with non-Christians. Most of us can witness in the school, work place, or even at home.

Zionites' Wellness Center



PHOTOS/SUE ANN JOHNSON

African Americans are extremely susceptible to numerous illnesses, including diabetes, hypertension, and certain forms of cancer.

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The African American Episcopal Zion Church has expanded its ministry to include the physical.

Situated on 86 acres in the heart of the Derita Community, the Wellness Center, is the first of its kind for the church.

Falling under the auspices of the church's Department of Brotherhood Pensions and Ministerial Relief, the opening of the center marks the beginning of a church movement aimed at taking care of the entire person from the spiritual to the physical. Headed by Celesta Shropshire-Miller, the center offers low cost medical care for residents of the area as well as church members.

Pastors can also take advantage of courses offered geared toward helping them deal with the many social problems that affect today's diverse congregations.

"Health, wellness and inner healing eventually

leads to total self actualization," Shropshire-Miller said. "I want to devote myself to helping people realize this essential aspect of growth and development."

The center opened by the almost two million member denomination earlier this year, features three examining rooms where doctors volunteer their time and services to examine patients in need. Currently, the center has several local doctors on staff - Drs. Gary Miller, Beverly Lassane and Dean Lassane, along with his colleagues at Southern States Chiropractic.

The church has traditionally been concerned with health issues. It offers ministers, church employees and members numerous health benefits, including insurance and a magazine, Vision Focus, which focuses on lifestyle and health issues.

The center could not have come at a better time. Recent studies show that African Americans are



New Wellness Center will provide much needed health treatment and education for Derita area.

extremely susceptible to numerous illnesses, including diabetes, hypertension, and certain forms of cancer.

To meet the needs of the congregation and area denizens, the center circulated a survey that focused on Derita residents needs, education level and age.

According to Shropshire-Miller, the Center will address many of the major health problems that affect African Americans. Hypertension, obesity and immunizations for children are already being addressed through educational literature and classes offered by the center.

Eventually, the church

will expand the center to include other facilities, but for now, Miller is content with what she sees. The wellness center just graduated its first group of ministers trained on how to address parishioners with drug addicts.

Still Shropshire-Miller hopes other community members will join the growing number of volunteers at the center.

"We have a need for doctors," she said. "We need more doctors who practice internal medicine, as well as podiatrists. This is just the beginning."

Interested in attending classes or volunteering time to the Zion Health and Wellness Center? Contact Celesta Miller 599-4630.

Money to rebuild

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA, S.C. - More than \$20 million in public and private funds is available to churches that have been burned and want to rebuild, says Andrew Cuomo, assistant secretary of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department.

"Our burned-out churches have become shameful monuments that show what we can be at our worst," Cuomo said Saturday. "Together, we will build new monuments that will show what we can do at our best."

The daylong workshop was the first of several planned by the National Rebuilding Taskforce. The group is made up of officials from HUD, the Justice Department, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Council of Churches and the Congress of National Black Churches.

Many churches have been burned in recent years across the Southeast. Some of those at predominantly black churches have been linked to the Ku Klux Klan.

"If the intent of the arson was to divide people, this seminar and all of the many diverse groups participating will show that it had the opposite effect - it didn't pull us apart, it brought us together," Cuomo said.

HUD will guarantee \$10 million in private-sector loans to churches, mosques, synagogues or other nonprofit organizations to finance rebuilding of facilities damaged by arson or terrorism. Organizations seeking assistance must first ask a bank or other financial institution for a loan.

More than \$8 million in grants and in-kind donations are available through the Burned Churches Fund, and \$2 million more in below-market-rate loans has been promised by the nonprofit Enterprise Foundation.

Habitat for Humanity and Mennonite Disaster Services are volunteering labor and technical help, and some members of the American Institute of Architects are offering design and planning assistance.

The reported damage to churches burned between 1993 and 1996 is only around \$11 million.

"We don't want to merely replace these churches," Cuomo said. "We want to build bigger, better churches."

EYE ON GOSPEL

Big Guns Rule At The Annual Gospel Music Workshop: As usual, it started off with a bang, the Savoy/Malaco Music Group pulling out their big guns with their annual showcase which traditionally kicks off the Industry (or Gospel Announcers track) of the annual meeting of the Gospel Music Workshop of America, held Aug. 10-16 in Pittsburgh.

The five-hour long showcase offering the best of the combined label's current and forthcoming product, featured live performances from LaShun Pace, Dorothy Norwood, Willie Neal Johnson & the Gospel Keynotes, the Williams Brothers, the Mississippi Mass Choir, and a rousing selection from the Georgia Mass Choir, with none other than Kirk Franklin at the helm. And Malaco/Savoy wasn't the only label with their big guns drawn. A Word Records showcase featured Shirley Caesar and Helen Baylor; Verity's

afternoon reception showcased Richard Smallwood and Daryl Coley; a combined Star Song/Crystal Rose/Alcho

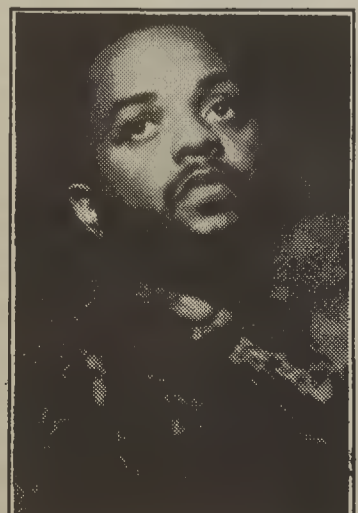


Rev. Clay Evans

showcase offered the GMWA Women of Worship and Ricky Dillard; and Fred Hammond & Radical For Christ jammed at a luncheon showcase sponsored by Benson Records, which while being hosted by

Hezekiah Walker also featured a performance from Commissioned. BET-TV host Bobby Jones emceed the GospoCentric's showcase luncheon which doubled as the 25th Anniversary Announcer's Guild luncheon and featured a video presentation offering the latest from Kirk Franklin, Kurt Carr and A-1 Swift, while featuring live performances from its sister label B-Rite Record's newly launched female vocal unit, Trin-I-Tee, which drew raves from the SRO crowd. Other acts people couldn't stop raving about included B. Chase Williams and his Shabach Choir who thrilled an SRO crowd at a Manufacturer's Showcase sponsored by Intersound; and the new Muscle Shoals act, "Men of Standard," a four-man vocal unit spearheaded by Isaac Caree and Lowell Pye, who once sang lead vocals with John P. Kee's New Life Community Choir. Their first vocal effort is due for release next month. Overall,

attendance seemed to be down (from the 15,000 earlier projected) at the Convention. And



Daryl Coley

while some major labels like Warner Alliance, Atlanta International Records and Sparrow kept a lower-than-normal profile, many of the smaller independents including Meek Records, Born

Again, In Sync and Marice Records beefed up their profiles hosting key events to showcase their wares to the nation's largest group of gospel announcers. Seminar highlights included the implementation of a retail panel aimed at finding ways to enhance the union between retailers, manufacturers and artists to strengthen the industry. Meanwhile, shopper favorites at the meet's famed "Midnight Madness" sale included Broderick E. Rice, Rev. Clay Evans, the GMWA Women of Worship, Gerald Thompson & Tennessee Full Gospel Choir, Walt Whitman & the Soul Children, Fred Hammond & Radical For Christ, Richard Smallwood, Pulse recording artist Craig Hayes, and of course Kirk Franklin & the Family. Meanwhile among those key speakers featured on the GMWA's newly launched ministry track were Bishop Paul Morton and the controversial Rev. Al Sharpton.