

Grace Memorial installs new pastor. Rev. Lawrence Mayes Sr. to take helm. See page 11A.

Sunday School LESSON



Completing the temple

The people of Israel came home from Babylon just as Isaiah and other prophets had predicted. Eagerly they began to rebuild the temple, but the difficulties were many and discouraging. The work was slow, and for a time it stopped altogether. Then God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to stir up the people and lead them to finish the temple. At the urging of these prophets the difficulties were overcome, and the temple was finished about 20 years after it was begun. These events were the focus of our lessons in September.

In October our four lessons from Daniel told of events that occurred in Babylon during the seventy years when the people of Israel were captives there. Now we take up the story where we left it at the end of September. The captivity is over; the people of Israel have been home for a little more than 20 years. At last the temple is completed.

Mention of the elders does not mean that young men had no part in the work. Probably they did most of the heavy work, but the elders are given credit because they supervised the endeavor. Perhaps these were the men who could remember the earlier temple, so they were put in charge of designing the new one.

Our lesson for Sept. 21-28 brought us samples of the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. When work on the temple had completely stopped and the people's priorities became misplaced, these two prophets had stirred up the elders and the people to resume the task. This time the people kept on building the temple 'til they finished it, according to the command of the God of Israel, given through his prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The completion of the temple was also according to the decrees of those rulers of the Medes and Persians who had taken control of Babylon's empire, three of whom are named.

Cyrus was king of the Medes and Persians when they overtook Babylon. In the first year of his reign, he issued a decree that the people of Israel should "go up to Jerusalem... and build the temple of the Lord God of Israel."

Then Darius, whose name appears in our text was not the Mede of whom we read in the book of Daniel. Apparently that Darius served under Cyrus in Babylon. This Darius was a later ruler, having authority over the entire Persian empire during the time when the temple in Jerusalem was completed. Darius was the one who found Cyrus' original decree granting permission to the Jews to rebuild their temple and then told those who opposed the project not to interfere. With the assistance, the work resumed and continued until it was completed.

The Persian ruler Artaxerxes reigned much later, after the temple was completed. It seems surprising, then, that his name appears here, and some have even alleged that the Bible is in error because it does. But Ezra returned to Jerusalem under the reign of Artaxerxes guaranteed additional government revenue for any needs Esar found for the temple. He was reigning when Esar wrote and because of the generous support he gave to the temple in his day.

The sixth year of the reign of King Sarius was about 516 B.C., some 20 years after the first group of captives had returned from Babylon. Adar is the Babylonian name for the 12th month of the year. It did not come at the beginning of winter as our 12th month of December does, but as the end of winter - around the last part of February and the first part of March. Thus the new year began with the new life of springtime.

Can you imagine how the people felt?

Religious seek protection in workplace

By Jonathan D. Salant THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Kathleen Pielech of Massachusetts had spent almost a decade working at a local race track when she was fired for refusing to work on Christmas.

"I was devastated," Pielech

recalled. "I loved my job and the hours I worked allowed me to spend lots of time with my children. Yet due to my single absence for religious reasons, I now found myself without a job."

She told her tale Tuesday to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, which is considering legislation requiring

employers to accommodate their workers' religious observances or practices unless it would impose a severe hardship.

The measure would tighten an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which courts have interpreted as allowing employers to refuse to make any accommodation for their workers' reli-

gious observances if it entailed more than a minimal effort or expense.

The bill would hold employers to the same standard required under other civil rights laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act.

John Kalwitz of Indiana, an Orthodox Jew, lost his job with

the Indiana Toll Road for refusing to work Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.

"I cannot express the total disillusion, anger, resentment and disgust I felt and feel to this day," Kalwitz told the senators. "I am proud to be an American and I am

See RELIGIOUS page 11A

Weekend moral summit set

By Jeri Young THE CHARLOTTE POST

A part of Charlotte's faith community will attempt to answer some difficult questions this weekend.

Ash-Shaheed Islamic Center will host its fourth annual moral summit. The center's goal is to get communities and individuals to start thinking and talking about diversity. Several workshops are planned that deal with topics from health and economic empowerment to educational opportunities for youth.

Brian Garrett, one of the program's organizers, says the goal is to get people to address diversity head-on.

"The idea came from our Iman who has worked in the community," he said. "It's a way to address the general issues about morality and the state of affairs in our community."

The summit's theme - "Education: The Key to Understanding the Importance of Human Diversity" underscores that.

The summit also allows other members of the faith community an opportunity to share in services and workshops with the group. Workshops are open to the public. Registration is \$15.

"The program has a dual purpose," Garrett said. "It gives people a better idea of what Islam is. And it's an opportunity for us to reach out to people of other faiths."

Several national speakers will attend the summit, including Iman Khalifah Umar Ramadan. Ramadan, who holds a Ph.D. in education, will discuss diversity.

The keynote address will be given by Iman Yahya Abdullah, a Texas-based religious leader and activist. Abdullah is the founder of African American Men Against Narcotics.

The summit will also include a talent show as well as an aerobic workout for women.

The center will also present "Torchbearer of Excellence" awards to those in the community who have made a difference. This year's recipients are UNC Charlotte professor Gregory Davis, Mecklenburg Ministries' Joanne Jenkins and Charlotte Observer religion reporter Tim Funk.

Friday

• 1 p.m. Salatul Jumah: Ash Shaheed Islamic Center, 2717 Tuckaseegee Road.

Speaker: Iman Yahya Abdullah. • 3 p.m. Down Home Fish and Chicken Fry, Ash Shaheed Islamic Center.

• 7 p.m. Talent Extravaganza: Greenville Center. Admission \$5.

Saturday

Power Walk and Sister Aerobics, 7 a.m. Johnson C. Smith University. Facilitators: Fateen Hakeem and Yasmin Muhammad. Free.

Adult workshops: Johnson C. Smith University.

• 9 a.m. - Preserving the Unity of Humanity by Building on the Diversity Allah has Created, Johnson C. Smith University. Facilitator: Iman Khalifah Umar Ramadan.

'He Welcomes Me...Give God The Glory'



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Ballet dancer Mel Tomlinson, center, with dancers Eva McCollum, left, and Thomasina Craig, right, during rehearsal for liturgical dance "He Welcomes Me...Give God The Glory," which will be performed at St. Pauls Baptist Church. Tomlinson, who has AIDS, produced and choreographed the show, which will include a performance by the Footprints ballet company.

Tomlinson to perform dance Nov. 9

By Jeri Young THE CHARLOTTE POST

Mel A. Tomlinson is the first to admit sometimes it's difficult to dance.

But, then again, he's had difficulties before. The wheelchair in a corner of his dining room and two canes near the front door attest to it.

"Some days I can dance a mile," Tomlinson says. "Other days, I can't even move."

On Nov. 9, Tomlinson will perform his liturgical dance, "He welcomes Me...Give God the Glory" at St. Paul Baptist Church where he's a member. It'll be difficult, but Tomlinson says he has to do it for his father, who died in January.

And for himself. Tomlinson found out he was HIV-positive in 1995.

"I've gotten to places I never dreamt of, especially being black," he said. "I know God put me there. The only thing that kept me there was my sense of humor and my incredible will. Sure there were obstacles in my way. I just climbed over and kept going."

Tomlinson used his mental and spiritual toughness to propel him to heights unknown to African American classically trained dancers. He battled racism and isolation. He battled other children who picked on him because he was different.

Tomlinson, 43, is facing his toughest opponent. He suffers from a particularly virulent form of meningitis which damaged his nervous system and often makes it difficult to walk, much less dance.

But that doesn't stop the Raleigh native from praising God with his talents.

Tomlinson wrote, choreo-

graphed and chose the music for "He Welcomes Me." He also designed and sewed the costume.

The performance begins with a reading of James Weldon Johnson's "Creation" and ends with a ballet choreographed by Tomlinson. In between, the audience will be treated to traditional gospel music performed by St. Paul's choirs and a piece called "Melody" written by a friend of Tomlinson's shortly before his death of AIDS-related complications.

"It's the last song he wrote," Tomlinson said. "It's sort of jazz with spiritual overtones. When you're near death, and you know it, you says things you wouldn't ever have said. You write things you never would have written. I know because there was a time when I thought I was near death."

Several movements highlight the beauty of classical dance and music.

"We're concentrating on delivering a message," he says. "The church is going to be an integrated place where people can gather with one peaceful thing in mind: To praise God's name - to give him praise."

Tomlinson hopes the performance will build many bridges, racial and spiritual. Professional dancers will perform with beginners.

His special guests, Southern Pines, N.C., ballet company Footprints, is predominantly white. Tomlinson and his church are predominantly black. Tomlinson is one of the few blacks to break through ballet's glass ceiling.

It's also about his disease.

"The virus touched through my body," Tomlinson said. "I lost a lot of friends due to ignorance. They hear the word AIDS, they think of the virus and dying. It's not

about that. I'm not about that. The performance will show that."

It's also a chance for him to say 'thank you' to all of the church members who welcomed him at St. Paul and in the community.

Through dance, Tomlinson will thank the gospel choir members who sat with him when he was too weak to move and the deacons who offered prayers that kept him motivated when he temporarily lost his eyesight earlier this year.

"It's a way of saying 'thank you' for all of the incredible blessings I have," Tomlinson said. "People in church are kind of confused about what kind of 'play' this is. It's not a play and it's not about me. It's about the church and God. The reason I wanted to express myself this way is because there is nothing better than being an active member. My niche is not the usher board or the deacon board. It's to sing and dance."

Tomlinson said the disease taught him a lot.

"Two years ago I felt like I was 90," he says. "I couldn't

walk. This disease has taught me humility. If it were not for my faith and my pets, I probably would have given up. I really didn't have that kind of belief in my talents. There were so many people who encouraged me."

To keep himself grounded, Tomlinson has hung pictures of himself at his lowest. Many show a painfully thin and gaunt man, almost unrecognizable.

"It lets me know there is a God," he said, pointing to a picture of himself taken shortly after he left the hospital. "I show them to people and they always gasp 'is that you?' Many things can happen because of this virus."

"Every move I make I have to think about it. If I try to run, I have to think r-u-n. I'm not really worried about the dance. I know God will carry me."

What matters now is that everyone knows he's about the business of the Lord, he said.

Mel Tomlinson will appear with Footprints Contemporary Ballet Nov. 9 at 6:30 p.m. at St. Paul Baptist Church, 1401 Allen St. The event is free.



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Mel Tomlinson prepares for Nov. 9 performance.