

ONLINE SOCIAL COMMUNITIES

African American pastors go online to improve Net safety

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help create safe communities online. As a result, TechMission presented suggestions to MySpace last fall (<http://www.safe-families.org/docs/myspac e.ppt>), including tools to help parents and communi-

ty leaders contribute to internet safety. Many of these suggestions have been implemented in MySpace's Parental Notification system.
"Social networking sites are just like neighborhoods—some are safe and some aren't said Andrew

Sears, executive director of TechMission. "You will have some neighborhoods that are dominated by slumlords that don't care about safety. Other neighborhoods have community associations where parents watch out for each other's kids to increase safety.

MySpace is giving a strong signal that they want to be the safe neighborhood online by providing parents with tools to be notified of their children's safety. Some other social networking sites have not yet taken such a stance."

Churches use Super Bowl Sunday to reach new souls

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIAMI—Football's faithful will file into house parties and bars and, of course, Dolphin Stadium on Super Bowl Sunday to observe their holiest of holy days. But they'll also be turning out in force at churches across the country, which are tapping the popularity of sports in hopes of saving souls.

Organizers of such Super Bowl events see them as a departure from the formality of organized religion—the type of gatherings that could make someone who doesn't typically attend services feel more at home in church.

"It's a way of reaching out into our community in a very informal, low-key way where we show people we're regular folks like they are without the pressure of church," said Pastor Luis Acosta of Pines Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation north of Miami in Pembroke Pines.

Pines Baptist has been holding Super Bowl events for a few years and expects about 300 people, mostly men, at its flag football game and watch party this year. The church drew about 250 people at a football-themed block party Jan. 13, which featured NFL-themed games, former Dolphins players signing autographs and giveaways

including a plasma television.

Acosta said the church doesn't take a heavy-handed approach to nonbelievers who take part in such events. There won't be so much as a prayer at the Super Bowl Sunday event. If a guest enjoys himself, a member might invite him to a church social group meeting, then maybe a Bible study, then perhaps an actual service.

"We just follow God's lead," Acosta said.

Pastor Mike Pierce of the non-denominational Poplar Creek Church in the Chicago suburb of Bartlett, Ill., takes a similar approach. About 100 people will watch the game on the big screen in the sanctuary. Like other church events—a carnival, a play and a pig roast—it's meant to simply create a friendly, fun environment, but not an overtly religious one.

"We don't turn everything into a spiritual event," Pierce said. "Good, clean fun is still spiritual."

Many pastors agree, simply trying to make their churches welcoming environments for new guests. Carrollwood Baptist Church in Tampa has been holding a Super Bowl gathering for more than 15 years and attendees have become so comfortable at the event that some bring recliners

from home.

"I like it because it's very laid back," said Robert Smith, a 32-year-old Rockford, Ill., resident who has attended Super Bowl parties at Dominion Christian Center there. "There's no pressure."

Churches are also aware many people are unwilling to do anything other than watch the game on Super Bowl Sunday.

"We can offer a good event surrounding something the culture uses or we can just hold church and no one's going to come," said Jim Waters, an associate pastor and minister to students at First Baptist Church in Milton in the Florida Panhandle.

Like many other churches holding Super Bowl events, the Milton congregation will screen "Power to Win," a video featuring Christian NFL stars, during halftime.

Some churches are using the Super Bowl as an opportunity to reach the poor.

A number of Nashville churches will host the homeless, feeding them, washing their clothes, letting them watch the game on big-screen TVs and giving them a bed to sleep in on Super Bowl Sunday. And at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Libertyville, Ill., members will gather donations for their Souper Bowl of Caring, to help fund the

parish food pantry, another one for the larger community, and a school under construction for African orphans.

William Baker, a retired University of Maine professor who has written two books about sports and religion, says the relationship between the two dates back to ancient times, but that in modern-day America it has been most prominently used by evangelical Christians. He calls sports part of the new "American trinity"—along with religion and patriotism—that hold a high level of importance for a huge chunk of the population.

"Any visitor from Mars on Super Sunday, whether he watches television or goes to the stadium in Miami," Baker said, "would say these people believe, maybe in God, but for sure they believe in the American flag and in the flyover military display and in patriotism, but most surely they believe in sports."

Baker said evangelicals had long rejected sports—for the gambling it often fueled, for often being played on the Sabbath and for the general bacchanalia it was associated with. But they eventually realized its immense reach.

"Sport becomes a kind of fish hook to catch the unbelievers," he said.

Southern Baptists oppose outreach with beer

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. LOUIS—A new church is attracting members with unconventional methods like pouring beer during theological discussions, but Southern Baptists say the outreach runs contrary to what the ministry represents.

A congregation of young St. Louisans called The Journey has grown from 30 members in 2002 to 1,300 members. The growth has been fueled by energetic programs, including Theology at the Bottleworks, a gathering at a suburban St. Louis microbrew pub for discus-

sions on serious and offbeat topics linked to religion, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported Sunday.

Conversations cover issues from racism in St. Louis to modern art controversies to the debate about embryonic stem cell research.

The Rev. Darrin Patrick, The Journey's founder and pastor, said participants at the pub are invited to Sunday services.

But Southern Baptists, with whom the church has a working relationship, are questioning the church's methods of attracting worshippers, specifically its use

of alcohol. That, they argue, runs contrary to a church teaching.

The Journey defines itself as an interdenominational church, but it has ties to the Missouri Baptist Convention. That confederation of Baptist churches is the state arm of the largest Protestant denomination in the country, the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Journey borrowed \$200,000 from the Baptist organization to help buy and renovate a former Catholic church in St. Louis in 2005.

At last year's annual meeting of the Southern Baptist

Convention, members overwhelmingly reaffirmed their traditional stance on alcohol by passing a resolution opposing "the manufacturing, advertising, distributing, and consuming of alcoholic beverages."

The Rev. Bill Edwards, chairman of the Missouri Baptist Convention's church planting subcommittee, has received a number of calls from Missouri Baptists complaining about The Journey's Web site, with pages that depict or refer to beer and wine consumption.

The Charlotte Post

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2007-2013 Transportation Improvement Program

The draft 2007-2013 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a capital projects program that describes the transportation projects to be implemented over the next seven years in the planning area of the Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO).

The Program of Projects required by 49 USC 5307 is a subset of the Transportation Improvement Program and the public review and comment solicited for this Transportation Improvement Program is intended to explicitly include and satisfy the public review and comment required under 49 USC 5307 (c) 1-7 for the Urbanized Area Formula Program.

MUMPO wants public feedback on the draft plan and invites citizens to two public hearings.



Public hearings are scheduled for:

Tuesday, February 6, 3 pm - 6 pm
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center
2nd Floor Conference Room 266
600 E. 4th Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Thursday, February 8, 3 pm - 6 pm
City of Monroe
City Hall
300 W. Crowell Street
Monroe, NC 28112

The TIP and other background information is available on the MUMPO website at www.mumpo.org. Comments may be sent to the MUMPO secretary electronically via the website. The email address is secretary@mumpo.org. Please call 704-336-8643 if you have any questions.