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Central Methodist sets Advent services

Central United Methodist Church is planning numerous Advent and Christmas celebrations.

November 28 - First Sunday in Advent. Classes will decorate Sunday School rooms and church at 5 p.m.; soup and sandwiches will be served in the fellowship hall at 6 p.m.

Sun., December 5 - Christmas trees will be up; 7 pm. Moravian Love Feast will be held in the sanctuary.

Wed., Dec. 8 - Family night covered dish supper at 6:15 p.m. The program will be hand-bells, choir chimes and carols.

Fri., Dec. 10 - Children's choir rehearsal and lock-in will begin at 6 p.m.

Sun., Dec. 12 - Poinsettias and pew candles will be in place; 7 p.m., the children's Christmas program will be held. Pre-school children will sing and The Children's Choir will present "Mr. Funfiddle's Christmas."

Fri., Dec. 17 - UMYF progressive dinner and lock-in will begin at 6 p.m.

Sun., Dec. 19 - The Chancel Choir will present "Light of the World" at the 11 a.m. worship hour; church-wide Christmas caroling to shut-ins will begin at 4:30 p.m.

Fri., Dec. 24 - Candlelight/communion service will be held at 7 p.m.

Sun., Dec. 26 - "Last Sunday of the Century - Hope for the New Year service," at 11 a.m.

MERGER

From 1A

said they knew nothing of Crawley's statement prior to its publication in The Star. The statement was not issued to the school systems. The Herald didn't receive a copy until Monday afternoon after Commissioner Charlie Harry had the County Manager's office send it by fax.

Crawley and Harry are both members of the Executive Roundtable, although they did not serve on the special education committee. However, Hawkins said several members of the committee are not employed in Cleveland County and he also questioned how two members of the Board of Commissioners could legally serve on a Roundtable that is discussing merger, and later vote on it as members of a governing board.

"If they're on this roundtable and talking education, and they have to make a decision on merger, it's illegal," Hawkins claimed.

Both Hawkins and McRae said they felt the educators adequately answered the committee's questions on students' preparedness for the workforce. Some business leaders said students had been tested for entry level jobs but could not pass the test, but both Hawkins and McRae said the business leaders could not tell the group if those persons tested were recent graduates of any of the county schools or if they were persons from other counties, or even older persons who were facing a career change after a number of years in another job.

"We have asked the Business Roundtable for information on who's taking the test, and they can't tell us," said Hawkins. "We've asked Cleveland Community College, which administered the test, and they can't tell us. It could be people from other counties or it could be people who are 50 years old and have been working in textiles or other industries that didn't require math and verbal skills, and now they want to work in high tech industry. They can't tell us if they are recent graduates of Kings Mountain, Crest or Shelby, or whatever."

Hawkins said KM District Schools are willing to work with industry "anyway we can" within the constraints of what the state tells them they can do. "We really want a partnership with business and industry - to work with those students who are not college bound and help prepare them for the workforce."

McRae said he feels the State testing programs are more than adequate to indicate students' preparedness for the workforce, but added that "we've said all along that if there is a problem in the preparation of our students that we want to know about it and want to work to address it. I do think the ABCs (testing programs) have as much promise for that as anything I've heard in a long time."

McRae said if the county is going to push for merger, he feels the matter should go before the public and "let the people talk about their concerns." Hawkins pointed out that the county commissioners have the authority to declare merger anytime they want to, but frankly said "they don't have the guts to come out publicly and make the decision on their own. They hide behind a group so they can come back later and say, 'well, industry wanted us to do this.'"

Hawkins pointed out that many of the business leaders are not permanent residents of Cleveland County, but simply

come here for awhile to run a business and then move on.

"To me, it's like ministers," he said. "They can either build up a church or tear it down, and then they're gone and the people have to deal with it."

"A lot of the CEOs of these companies, when they start getting their taxes increased because of school merger, are going to come down and put a whipping on their heads."

Hawkins said his statements will probably draw the ire of business leaders and commissioners, but added "if they think I'm doing this to perpetuate my seat on the School Board, I'll resign next month and fight this thing."

"They've got to come up with some good reason why merger will be in the best interest of our kids before I'll go along with it," he said. "It's not because industry wants it. Their hidden agenda is that the Shelby school system is a locked in district, and they want them more power."

Hawkins said a merger would be just the beginning of many problems, comparing it with the U.S. sending tons of money to foreign countries to keep certain people in power only to later see the government fail anyway.

"They're wanting to build something up that's dying," he said. "If Shelby wants to build up, they ought to reduce their taxes and entice people to move back into the city."

Several efforts to contact other members of the Board of Commissioners and Roundtable committee failed, but The Herald was successful in talking with Harry. He said he had nothing to do with preparing the statement to The Star, but "assumed (Jim Crawley) prepared it after having conversations with us individually." Harry said the commissioners did not meet as a group to discuss the matter.

"During the week last week he (Crawley) met with me and as he could catch the others he would meet with them and talk about it," Harry said. "I think the letter evolved from that process."

Harry did not say if he is pushing merger, but did say "my mind is wide open. I believe we need to explore it as thoroughly as we can."

The letter did not specify who would be responsible for studying the merger issue, but indicated commissioners did not want anyone from the outside doing it. It also said "commissioners would reserve further comment on this matter until their merger assessment has been completed."

Harry said he was "sure I'll know more in 90 days than I know today," but added the 90-day statement was one he just pulled out of the air ("I could have said 120 days," he said) and not a deadline for a merger vote.

By state law, commissioners can at any time vote on school merger or they can put it to a vote of the citizens. The state also has the power to dictate school merger.

But Hawkins said he is tired of hearing it.

"What we do as a school system is based on what the state is sending down telling us what to teach. It's not based on what industry wants us to teach," he said. "This issue runs a lot deeper. If they could show us one reason that merger would be in the best interest of our children, I don't think you'd have anybody standing in their way. The problem is they can't show that. I don't think they can get any better cooperation than what we're already giving them. If merger ever comes they should let the people say what they want."