

Union Baptist Church chides BET programs

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (NNPA) - Union Baptist Church is joining a group around the nation unhappy with Black Entertainment Television's programming. The church's pastor, Sir Walter Mack Jr., has announced that he is spearheading a petition drive aimed at getting the network, which is owned by media giant Viacom, to rethink its choices. Mack hopes to get 10,000 signatures from local people by the end of the month.

The effort also hopes to gain support from other churches and community organizations here and around the nation.

Mack was disturbed by commercials that recently aired to promote the channel's BET Awards, which aired June 28 live from Los Angeles. The commercials — which featured married actors Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith and their children — were meant to mock the idea that the Smiths

have a picture-perfect family. In the beginning of the spots, the family is pictured as an ideal group, but by the end of the ads, the family lets loose with even the little ones uttering some bleeped expletives.

Many found the ads comical. But they were no laughing matter for Mack.

"This abrasive image of youth showing disrespect to their parents using foul language and the parents responding with like behavior is one of a litany of unacceptable images currently portrayed by BET," Mack said in a statement. "While some individuals found the discourse amusing and entertaining, I found it to be both disturbing and unacceptable."

The ads did have an effect. The recent awards show drew nearly 6 million viewers, a record for the network.

Over the past several years, BET has increasingly come under fire from African-Americans. When it was founded in 1980 by Robert Johnson, the owner of the

Charlotte Bobcats basketball team, it was praised for giving a voice to the often neglected Black community. Back then, the network offered a good balance of entertainment, news and educational programs.

Critics say BET today is only concerned with showing rap videos that often portray violence and show scantily clad women.

In recent years, the network has axed its educational and news shows, most recently its "Nightly News" show.

Debra Lee, the new head of the network, said the news show was no longer relevant.

"With 24-hour news networks and everyone getting news off the Internet, our audience doesn't want to wait until 11:00 p.m. to find out what the news is," said Lee.

Many disagree and have accused the network of taking the low road in programming. Johnson was accused of choosing profit over quality in 2000 when he sold BET to Viacom for a reported \$3

billion. Viacom owns MTV, VH1, Paramount Studios, CBS and many other entertainment entities.

Mack says it is time for people to stop talking about their concerns about BET and start to act on them.

"It is no longer enough for the church and community to discuss their disdain with media depictions of our people, but we must take a stand and demand that our voices not only be heard, but

honored," he said.

The petition also outlines concerns about "degrading activities, overt sexual behavior, lewd conversations and other unacceptable images and portrayals" on the network.

A petition is already set up in the church's sanctuary. Soon, the church hopes to set petitions at other locations throughout the city and set up a link on its website so that people can sign there, as

well. Organizers are also encouraging people to come by the church to pick up petitions so that they can obtain signatures on their own. When all the signatures are gathered at the end of this month, the church plans to send them to Lee.

Those interested in the petition drive should call Kia Hood at (336) 724-9305, ext 223, or log on to www.unionbaptistwsnc.org.

Two St. Louis deejays suspended for discussion on harming cops

ST. LOUIS (AP) - Two hip-hop radio personalities have been suspended for an on-air discussion of ways to fight police officers — comments made not long after an officer was slain.

Officials at KATZ-FM would not detail the comments, but said the remarks made on Wednesday related to ways to hurt or disarm police officers. The two suspended disc jockeys, whose professional names are DJ Kaos and DJ Sylli Asz, were

discussing with callers on their morning show how to fight for an officer's radio so he or she cannot call for help, the station said.

Lee Clear, general manager of the station, apologized for the comments, calling them "entirely inappropriate." The radio personalities, whose real names were not immediately available, also apologized.

Clear noted that the station's owner, Clear Channel Communications, had

just used its stations to ask the public for information to help find the killer of Sgt. William McEntee, who was fatally shot July 5 in the St. Louis suburb of Kirkwood. A suspect has been arrested.

"We just buried an officer last week," St. Louis Police Chief Joe Mokwa said. "Nobody wants to hear some comic remark about disarming a police officer and taking their radio away so they can't get help. That was outrageous."

The detective said he forgot about them, a claim Cooper called "absolutely incredible" during Tuesday's hearing.

The documents show in part that Kenny Boagni, who became friends with Perez in prison, told police in 2000 and 2001 that Perez acknowledged working security for Death Row on the night Wallace was killed. Boagni, who on Tuesday refused to be deposed without his attorney present, also told police that Perez said he called Mack on his cell phone before the shooting.

Death Row was embroiled in a rivalry at the time with Wallace's Bad Boy Entertainment label, led by Sean "P. Diddy" Combs. Death Row's star artist Tupac Shakur — who had traded insults with Wallace on various songs — was gunned down on the Las Vegas Strip six months earlier. That killing also remains unsolved.

The rivalry was central to the theory advanced in the Wallace suit, which sought unspecified damages. But all evidence presented at trial was circumstantial, with witnesses linking Mack only peripherally to Death Row events.

B.I.G.

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to make of the ruling.

"It could be good, it could be bad. I don't have any idea," Vincent said. "I'd like to try the case on the merits."

Family attorney Perry Sanders Jr. said the family — including Wallace's mother Voletta and widow R&B singer Faith Evans — didn't want to have to go through another trial but would do so. He said the case would now delve into a corruption scandal in the LAPD's Rampart division dating to the 1990s.

"We're about to get to the bottom of Rampart," Sanders said. "We're about to peel the onion back to its rotten core."

Perez was a central figure in the scandal, which involved alleged misconduct or brutality by corrupt officers in an anti-gang unit. More than 100 criminal convictions possibly tainted by police misconduct were reversed. Perez alleged wrongdoing by others after he was found to have stolen cocaine from an evidence room. Perez was the focus of most of the recently discovered documents, which had been sitting in an LAPD detective's desk drawer until late last month.

Usher opens performers camp

ATLANTA (AP) - Usher, who began singing at age 6, has opened a summer camp to help some other prodigies-in-training.

Usher Raymond, the 26-year-old R&B star, dropped by for the first day of Camp New Look, an Atlanta program he recently started for minority youth in his home city. For two weeks, 150 campers, aged 8 to 18, hole up at Clark Atlanta University, hone their specialties — either singing, dancing or basketball — and learn about the respective industries.

"This is truly about learning the business side," Usher said Monday. "You're not going to learn it all overnight, but maybe, just maybe, you'll learn enough to change your life."


The children also sit in on panels and discussion sessions with agents, managers

and sports executives to learn the financial side of entertainment and sports. Guest teachers will include Denver Nuggets forward Carmelo Anthony and Atlanta Falcons cornerback DeAngelo Hall.

Their lessons will be put to the test Saturday, when they are expected to coordinate a charity celebrity basketball game and headline the halftime show.

The camp, Usher said, will be the first of many summers where kids are pushed to aim higher than just playing for a basketball team, but will be encouraged to aim at owning one. The singer is co-owner of the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers.


Usher also asked the kids and counselors to treat him like a family member — albeit one with a burly bodyguard and a camera crew for an unnamed TV project following his every move.



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