

Church viewed as vehicle for justice

By Gordon Jackson
Special to Sentinel-Voice
DALLAS (NNPA)—Gadflies: large flies, like the horsefly, that bites livestock — they carry a reputation of tremendously annoying people and rousing them from complacency.

If Rev. Al Sharpton — described by some as a political gadfly — has it his way, there will be a nationwide swarm of gadflies bugging the African-American community to an unprecedented level of positive action. Perhaps last week's National Conference and Revival for Social Justice in the Black Church, held for two days at Friendship West Baptist Church, could have been considered a national gadfly convention.

At least one result from the conference is that local chapters of both the National Action Network and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition are being formed in the Dallas area.

Sharpton, founder and president of the National Action Network, led a corps of nationally and locally prominent speakers to inject a revived sense of social activism into the Black community through the Black church. A significant part has lost its main focus, according to Sharpton.

"We have many preachers but very few ministers," Sharpton said directly during the conference's opening address. "They make people feel good but don't have people doing better. People that are in shackles don't need people to anoint their shackles. Many of us treat

church like a Sunday jackpot, hoping you get some material blessing from God, like some wheel in Las Vegas."

Not giving specific names, Sharpton and several of the other 100 ministers representing 20 states at the event criticized, in general, today's Black megachurches for emphasizing prosperity for their congregations, but leaving out practical agendas like helping its fellow man and uplifting the African-American community as a whole.

"We want to make sure that the legacy of civil rights, being advocates for justice for those engaging in the struggle does not leave us because of the current impact of prosperity that seems to be redirecting the winds of the church."

Sharpton fired at the Christian conservative whom he said uses sexual issues such as gay rights and abortion as smokescreens to downplay other important issues such as poverty, bigotry, the war in Iraq and poor education in public schools.

Friendship West Senior Pastor Rev. Frederick Haynes stated: "We're not wrapping the flag around the cross; the cross is going to tell the flag what it's supposed to wave. We're giving birth to a social justice movement and revival."

Rev. Jesse Jackson, founder and president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, spoke to about 100 local community leaders and announced plans to open up a Dallas chapter of his organization to unite many of the Black organizations under

one umbrella. He urged the audience to not let mainstream media or political policies devalue the quality of African-Americans in general.

"There's a cultural block-out by mainstream media," Jackson said. We're appraised as less hard working, less universal, less intelligent, more violent, less patriotic. We live out of the views of the eye of the apaiser."

In reference to the rap song "It's Hard Out Here For a Pimp," which won an Oscar this year, Jackson countered, "That's a judgment. It's not hard to be a pimp. It's not hard to demean some weak-minded person." He continued, "It's hard to finish college. It's hard to get

your MBA, your law degree, get a contract to construct, to be the chief of fire, to be the mayor or governor."

Jackson reminded listeners that Black America is undefeated in overcoming major issues that have plagued them, issues much worse than the ones being faced today.

Sharpton, like Jackson, injected victorious historical accounts to the 2,000 in attendance.

"Our people beat George Wallace (Alabama), Orval Faubus (Arkansas), Lester Maddox (Georgia), governors during the Civil Rights Movement who used federal troops to resist integration. You sit up here scared of Tom DeLay and George Bush.

"Martin Luther King

changed this nation; he never had a fax machine. Marcus Garvey organized Black folk; he never even had e-mail."

Beverly Mitchell-Brooks, president of the Dallas Urban League, believes that unity, with a comprehensive common vision, needs to be executed soon for African-Americans.

"All you can do is try and hope that the ugly head, the competition, the ego, the crabs-in-the-barrel mentality doesn't show," Brooks said. "We have enough people that have the vision to put all of that in the corner and concentrate the vision, regardless of who's leading."

Sharpton finished in a very outspoken fashion, lambasting the type of ministry he feels is misrepresenting

the Black church.

"The mainstream media does not speak for us. They get them one or two hired Negroes and act like they speak for the Black community," Sharpton said.

Sharpton continued: "If you have this unspoken agreement to tell us to prosper and to look for some lottery hit in heaven, and not address the pain of our people, then you're awarded with all kind of celebrity status and dinner at the White House.

"We come out of a tradition from Moses to Martin. We're not interested in eating with Pharaoh, we're interested in freeing the children of Israel."

Gordon Jackson writes for the Dallas Examiner.

Candidates

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and Kevin Child for County Recorder; Linda Howard and Louis Toomin for Public Administrator; along with Robert Gronauer and Beatrice Turner for Las Vegas Constable.

Candidates spoke on various issues: the use of deadly force, recruitment of a diverse workforce, community-oriented police patrols in the neighborhoods, character and integrity of public officials, maintaining trust with the public, voter fraud and purging the list of people illegally registered to vote, and sound investment of taxpayers' funds.

Noticeably absent were education candidates running for the Clark County School District Board of Trustees, State Board of Education, and the State University



JACK CARTER

Board of Regents.

Another issue that gained wide prominence over the past two years was racial profiling by metro, but no discussion was made by any of the candidates running for Sheriff or mentioned by any of the members of the audience.

Two people shared their perspective and issues of interest after the forum:

Otistine Brown said "I'm concerned that many, many African-American males are in prison and in jail, and I would like to know what went wrong. Why do we have a large number of our



LINDA HOWARD

men incarcerated? During slavery, the chains were placed on our people to prevent them from running away and exercising their freedom. We now face imprisonment of our people and it needs to stop. What are the politicians going to do about this?"

Ronald Wells spoke about the organization of the forum. He said, "It was confusing, the beginning of the meeting was like a totalitarian thing; that one person was dictating who could speak and for how long. But as the night went on, it got better and people were able to participate and ask questions."



TIM WILLIAMS

Jerry Neal said, "According to the Nevada Revised Statutes, we are guaranteed by state law that we can spank our children. However, parents are afraid of disciplining their children because of the treatment that they will receive from the courts. This has allowed our children to run amuck knowing that they can file a complaint of abuse against their parents for spanking them. In the end, these children wind up getting into trouble, associating with gangs, dealing drugs, going to jail, or killed by the police."

Gap

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couple of days, Democrats are saying to the Speaker, 'Mr. Speaker, until there is an increase in the minimum wage, we will not support any raise in congressional salaries.'

Individual states do have the right to increase the minimum wage above the national rate and, so far, 21 states and the District of Columbia have done so.

Of those states, Arkansas, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island are set to enact the new rates between this fall and the start of 2008.

Another report also co-authored by Bernstein, "Buying Power of Minimum Wage at 51-year Low," said since the minimum wage was established in 1938, the longest period of time Congress went without adjusting the level was nine years and three months from January 1981 to April 1990.

If Congress doesn't act by December 1, they could beat that record.

The report added, "Since September 1997, the purchasing power of the minimum wage has deteriorated by 20 percent. After adjust-


ing for inflation, the value of the minimum wage is at its lowest level since 1955."

Couple a steadily increasing cost of living with a minimum wage that's been frozen for nine years, and it just doesn't add up — especially for the poor, the report said.

"The fact that the minimum wage has remained the same for nearly nine years means that its real value has declined considerably over this period. As inflation has accelerated recently due to higher energy costs, the real value of the minimum wage has fallen faster," said the report.

Although the economy is constantly shifting — stable for a few years and unstable the next — Bernstein said Black Americans can't wait in five or 10 years for the economy to shift more positively to narrow the gap for them. He said acquiring more education and demanding that even local government create jobs are some ways to help.

Bernstein said, "African-Americans should never stop being vigilant about these racial income and wealth gaps as long as they exist."



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— Ms. Kris, Las Vegas Class of 2002