

L.A. clergy to rebuild ruined churches

By Gene C. Johnson Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) — As part of a plan under development by former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, several key Los Angeles-area ministers have agreed to join a nationwide effort to rebuild churches devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

Still in its preliminary stages, the plan calls for at least 360 churches and synagogues across the United States to collectively send collection proceeds to an "appropriate source" in New Orleans for one month for the purpose of reviving some of the churches and congregations scattered after the August 2005 hurricane.

"We're not trying to say how much, but it would be a Macedonian [large] offering to help those in need. That would give us the capacity to bring back pastors to at least 36 churches," said Young, a New Orleans native, to some 50 clergy representing various denominations who gathered Feb. 9 at West Angeles

Church of God in Christ.

"And we expect those pastors to have a community development coordinator that would, then, as people begin to come back, help them with their insurance claims, damage assessment."

Young said he wants the collective to build a trustworthy network.

"That's all that we're asking today is that you consider your ability to commit your institutions to work with the people in New Orleans," he said.

Ministers who immediately pledged support include: Bishop Johnny J. Young, pastor of Church of God Pentecostal in Inglewood; Rev. Leslie R. White, pastor of Grant AME Church in Watts; and Bishop Charles E. Blake, pastor of West Angeles Church of God in Christ — whose church already relegated \$180,000 to earlier hurricane relief efforts.

"We should have known that this was not enough," Blake said. "This [relief effort] is a long haul and not a

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Former UN Ambassador



sprint. It's a marathon."

Added New Orleans City Councilwoman Cynthia Williard-Lewis: "Churches are the standard bearer of morality. When there are no churches, there is no soul."

Williard-Lewis represents the 9th Ward, one of the regions hardest hit by Katrina. "You [clergy] are here to help repair the breach," she said. "In mind, body, spirit psy-

chology, finances — every part of your entire being is wounded if you're living in New Orleans — if you're truly living in New Orleans."

A possible alternative to bringing in needed funds, Young said, could be via the Earned Income Tax Credit, which is available to families with at least two children and earnings under \$30,000 a year.

"There are monies out there," he said. "All our churches have people living below the poverty line, who simply by filling out a few papers and answering a few right questions, could pick up about \$4,000 of earned income tax credit — which they've never asked for. They can get it for three years going back."

Young said that most of the church members in New Orleans probably have "\$12,000 waiting for them if somebody helped them to fill out the [tax] papers and ask for it. This is their money. And they have no resources to get it."

John Bryant, CEO of Operation HOPE, said he would assign staff from his organization to work with New Orleans churches as financial counselors. "This is your

money. You worked for it," he said. "And if you don't take it [Earned Income Tax Credit] up, it goes back to the [U.S.] Treasury and disappears."

"The fact is that time is running out for our people," added Joe Givens, a consultant working with Young. "Eighteen months have gone by now. There are 200,000 people still exiled. It is our belief that unless congregations are able to come back — and stand up full — that they won't come back."

"I don't understand why nothing is happening over there [in New Orleans]," said Givens, also a New Orleans native. "We're not just rebuilding houses, gentleman. We've got to rebuild lives and people."

Gene C. Johnson Jr. writes for Wave Newspapers.

Lending

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Taylor says he does not think borrowers of "any race" totally understand all of the language and pitfalls of the mortgage business, such as the difference between annual percentage rates and effective annual rates or the significance in the frequency of compounding interest, issues that tend to lead to default and foreclosures.

"We need to protect consumers in a way that they don't have to be economists" to be successful in owning a home, said Taylor. "Because someone is not financially literate, you shouldn't be able to rob them."

William Spriggs, Chair of Howard University's economics department, says that one of the things resulting in defaults on these loans among Blacks is the effect of adjustable rates on those loans.

"Many think that something like a one percent increase from six to seven is insignificant, but in fact it's a big deal," said Spriggs.

In an attempt to combat harsh outcomes of subprime lending, Freddie Mac, a company that purchases mortgages to support homeownership, has recently announced that the company will refrain from buying subprime mortgages with high likelihood of payment shock and foreclosure.

The company is developing a new model of subprime products that will give more protection, characterized by longer fixed terms and reset periods, according to Sharon McHale, vice president of public relations for Freddie Mac.

Under the company's stricter subprime lending standards, low-documentation underwriting will be limited to ensure that borrowers can afford their homes.

Taylor says in order to limit foreclosures that result from subprime loan defaults, both borrowers and lenders must take responsibility.

Borrowers need to be better educated and informed about their investment, but "[Lenders] ought to be highly honest, highly regulated and highly accountable."

Jenice Richardson writes for the Howard University News Service.

Your Horoscope Says... March 15-21

ARIES

This week will bring a tendency to dwell on a past betrayal. Your feelings of suspicion are well founded. However, do not personalize it. Work against the harmful act but not against the person who committed it.

Soul Affirmation: I am what I consistently do.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 6, 23

TAURUS

Look forward to excellent financial news based on something you're likely to do this week. Wow! It's about time. This week might be an excellent week to window shop for a dream vacation or luxury purchase. You can even window shop in your imagination for the best possible dream vacation location.

Soul Affirmation: Smooth communications is the key to my success this week.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 18, 44

GEMINI

In the spiritual realm appearance is not important, but in the physical realm looking good matters a great deal. Love has a foot in both realms. It is your challenge to balance the spiritual and physical aspects of love this week.

Soul Affirmation: Slow and steady is an enjoyable way to go.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 6, 13

CANCER

Stand up and get ready. Be a public speaker this week. Any subject you choose is ripe for your "rap." Spin the tale. Tell the story. People will be fascinated by the way you see things. They'll be impressed. Watch out for a jealous friend when attention is on you.

Soul Affirmation: I make the first step and the universe will come to my aid.

Lucky Numbers: 24, 32, 53

LEO

Be as sharp as you can be this week. Make being alert a personal challenge. Watch carefully for details that might otherwise escape your notice as you search for the best way to get things done at work. Be steadfast in your determination and don't be pulled into conflict with coworkers.

Soul Affirmation: There are other fish in the sea waiting for me.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 23, 27

VIRGO

What do you do when you're not as lucky as usual? Slow the game down. Risk less. Bet conservatively in all areas of your life. Restrain yourself. Give the job at hand your attention. Live in the present, and enjoy what is, rather than in anticipation of what luck might have brought.

Soul Affirmation: Truth is revealed in the smallest grain of sand.

Lucky Numbers: 27, 41, 52

LIBRA

Like-mindedness is going to be hard to achieve among your coworkers, but there are likely to be a few who see things as you do. Choose carefully and find someone to walk with you on this week's journey. Some words of encouragement might be needed to enlist the person you choose.

Soul Affirmation: My needs will be met if I just ask.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 9, 14

SCORPIO

Where are you going in such a hurry? What you want you already have. Stop looking around yourself trying to find out what's missing. Nothing is missing. The best kind of discovery this week is self-discovery.

Soul Affirmation: I get because I give.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 18, 45

SAGITTARIUS

Knowing and accepting your love nature is extremely important. Don't try to claim that it is as society says it should be. Acknowledge the fact that your love and friendship are often inseparable. You like to be in an adventure with your lover just as you would a partner or a friend. Create this situation by holding the truth of your nature in consciousness.

Soul Affirmation: I enjoy the love that others have for me.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 24, 47

CAPRICORN

Don't spread yourself too thin. But if you'll need to move around in many different circles this week, your spirit should be high, and your vibes are strong for meeting new people. You will be receiving a piece or two of great news. Expect the unexpected. You'll be pleasantly surprised.

Soul Affirmation: I give love, and love gives to me.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 50, 55

AQUARIUS

Strong vibrations make for a series of dramatic interactions with others this week. Practice your art with your heart, and let your energy carry you upwards to your best, highest self. Keep emotions calm.

Soul Affirmation: I know where I'm going because I know where I've been.

Lucky Numbers: 32, 38, 43

PISCES

You'll be energizing others this week as you speak what's on your mind regarding spiritual matters and masters. The quality of your thoughts is very pure; write yourself a love letter.

Soul Affirmation: My imagination is the source of my happiness.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 23, 29