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John Railey
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AN END TO THE SILENCE
TACKLING A TABOO

CRITICS SAY THAT BLACK CHURCHES, THE HEART AND SOUL OF THEIR COMMUNITIES, ARE NOT RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM OF AIDS, THOUGH THE NUMBER OF CASES IS STAGGERING

Five words from her daughter marked the start of Lelia Bailey's long and lonely journey. "I tested positive for HIV," Angela Dolby told her mother on a November night in 1990.

As her daughter explained to her that HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, Lelia Bailey was incredulous. This was her only child speaking, the baby she had given birth to at age 19. This was the grinning girl in pigtailed who had blossomed into a confident young woman of 22 in her second year of law school at N.C. Central University in Durham. This was her clean-living daughter who didn't even date until she was a junior at Winston-Salem State University.

AIDS, Bailey thought, was not something that happened to black women like her daughter. "It was white, gay males," said Bailey, a 49-year-old receptionist who lives in Winston-Salem.

Bailey has learned plenty since then. About diarrhea and crippling infections and weight loss and everything else that comes with what she calls "the raggedy disease." She also learned about other things that come with AIDS: alienation as some friends and relatives turn away.

And, like many other blacks, she has seen indifference to the disease from the black church, the traditional heart and soul of the black community. Bailey's former church is St. Philips Moravian, one of the oldest black congregations in continuous existence in the South. It has not tackled the AIDS issue.

The congregation is far from alone. As AIDS has moved from mainly striking white homosexuals to increasingly hitting blacks, critics say that many black clergy and churchgoers, both here and nationwide, aren't responding to the problem - even as they lose friends and relatives of all ages to AIDS.

Critics say that these churches, many of which served as staging points for the civil-rights movement, are dodging what some call the worst threat to blacks since slavery. This despite pleas from the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Surgeon General David Satcher, county social workers and some local ministers.

"Unfortunately, throughout the nation, African-American churches for the most part have come to view AIDS as the untouchable taboo in the community," said the Rev. Seth Larney of Goler Memorial AME Zion Church here.

But Larney's congregation and a few others are among the black churches fighting back. Goler has a small team that ministers to AIDS patients, and so does Union Baptist Church here. The Union Baptist group helped Bailey and her daughter through the daughter's last months in 1997. Such groups balance convictions that homosexuality is a sin against what they see as a gospel imperative to love and help their neighbors. They also try to educate communities about how to prevent AIDS. And as they work, they try to sound a wake-up call to others.

"I still believe in God," a local black man who has AIDS said recently. "I go to church, but I don't let anybody in church know that I have HIV." Ed Rhodes, another local black man who is HIV positive, said he has found acceptance here among a small group of blacks that studies the Bible in a home, he said, but has been leery of seeking an organized church.

They are just two of the faces behind the statistics. Of the 28 new cases of AIDS reported in Forsyth County last year, 86 percent were from blacks, according to the county health department; 11 percent were from whites; and almost 4 percent were from Hispanics. Of 788 new cases reported statewide, 71 percent were from minorities.

Those figures did not include reports of people who tested positive for HIV - 37 in Forsyth County last year.

Nationally, AIDS is the No. 1 killer of blacks between the ages of 25 and 44, and blacks make up almost half of all new AIDS cases. The Clinton administration is spending $156 million this year on AIDS among minorities.

Madeline Harold, the outreach coordinator at AIDS Care Service here, has seen people who have AIDS
rejected in both black and white churches. Harold said that more help is needed from churches.

"I do see many, many churches reaching out beautifully. All it takes is one parishioner to stand up and say, 'It's time to open our hearts, our brothers and sisters are dying.' Or one parishioner who is dying of AIDS. When they see that pain in their pew, their hearts are opened."

Larry Roth, the executive director of AIDS Care Service, said that white churches of varied denominations have supported his organization, "but we have not had a lot of support from black churches."

"We have had some dedicated black church members on our board, and even a black pastor on our board for a while, but we have not had significant financial help or real heavy involvement from volunteers from those churches. We would absolutely welcome that kind of support," Roth said.

Harold and Roth are white.

Some black religious leaders say that many black people of faith are in denial. "It's been more like the proverbial ostrich sticking our heads in the sand rather than attempting to meet the problem head-on," said Khalid Griggs, the imam, or prayer leader of the Community Mosque of Winston-Salem.

At his mosque, a group for recovering Muslim substance abusers, Millati Islami, includes AIDS education in its programs.

Rhodes said he wishes that more black-faith communities would get involved. "They're good with gossip, but as far as doing something positive to help, no. If they would wake up and really address this with education and common sense, I think we could move forward with it as the white community has."

The Rev. John Mendez of Emmanuel Baptist has begun to raise AIDS as an issue at his church here. At the same time, he said, black churches like his are dealing with the need for good jobs, putting food on the table and health-care issues that he says are even more pressing than AIDS.

And there aren't many black or white churches that deal with sexuality, he said.

The Rev. George Allison, the executive director of the state branch of the NAACP, said that black churches must tackle issues of jobs and health care and AIDS.

One of the biggest factors slowing the reaction of black churches to the crisis is the argument advanced by some ministers that AIDS is God's scourge on homosexuals and drug addicts, observers say.

The Rev. Carlton Eversley of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church here remembers first hearing the scourge theory at a local health conference about 10 years ago. "When they had the question-and-answer and so forth, I'll never forget someone from the floor talking about AIDS as punishment for sin and so forth," said Eversley, who is black.

Eversley's attitude toward homosexuality has evolved. At 12, he said, he was molested by a counselor at a church camp. "I started hating 'faggots,'" he said, adding that he was speaking in the language he used in the years after he was molested.

What changed his attitude, he said, was a friendship he had with a gay chaplain at Northwestern University and a book that the man encouraged him to read, Embodiment, by James Nelson. "When people talk about this issue, they need to talk about personalities and personal experiences as opposed to hiding behind scripture."

Most of the black ministers and their congregations who are fighting AIDS here believe homosexuality is a sin. But they say that doesn't stop them from loving people living with AIDS, whether those people contracted the disease through homosexual encounters, heterosexual encounters or through intravenous drug use.

"The God I serve is a God of love," said the Rev. Eddie White of Mount Sinai Faith, Hope and Love Ministries in Thomasville.

White and other black ministers were drawn into the fight as AIDS hit people they knew. The death from AIDS of a man who once belonged to their church got several members of Union Baptist involved.

The ministry group from Union Baptist began working with Bailey and Dobly in the fall of 1997. By then, Dobly had graduated from law school and practiced law for a time in Philadelphia, despite the fact that doctors diagnosed her disease as full-blown AIDS in early 1995.

Bailey, who is divorced from her daughter's father, had moved to Philadelphia to live with her daughter. They read up on AIDS and the best ways to live with it. Dobly, braver than many, began telling friends and family about her condition. Bailey said that most of Dobly's friends and family were supportive, but a few weren't. "They were trying not to let the stigma affect them, but ... it's like they want to push it aside."

The mother and daughter were members of a black church in Philadelphia. St. Matthew's AME. Dobly told church members about her disease, Bailey said, and the pastor and some members were supportive - although one woman panicked when she heard what Dobly had. They also became friends with a white, female rabbi who often visited Dobly.

As Dobly grew increasingly weaker, she and her mother decided to return here in the summer of 1997.

"She had wanted to come back because this was her home," Bailey said.

They bought a modest frame house on Gray Avenue and moved here in late August. Through a service group, they heard about the Union Baptist ministry team, which "adopts" people living with AIDS. "We have given assistance wherever it is necessary," said the Rev. James Lewis Jr., the director of Christian education for Union Baptist.

Sammie Gray of Walkertown, a member of the Union Baptist team, sensed that Dobly had a strong faith. "She said she had accepted Christ and read her Bible," said Gray, a 64-year-old grandfather. He and his
wife, Inez, came to think of Dolby like one of their own children as they spent hours sitting and chatting with her.

By her daughter's side
When the folks from Union Baptist weren't around, the mother would sit by her daughter's bed, and they would take turns reading the Bible aloud together. The mother would talk about AIDS with her daughter, whom she called her "baby lady."

Bailey said she believes her daughter contracted HIV from her first boyfriend, a WSSU student. Dolby went to be tested for HIV after learning from a friend that the boyfriend had died of AIDS, her mother said.

Dolby went through anger and denial before finding a sense of peace, Bailey said. Her daughter didn't feel guilty about contracting the disease, the mother said.

"A lot of people kind of blame the person. But when you're 20 years old, it's natural to become sexually active."

Dolby didn't tell the members of St. Philips Moravian, her childhood church, about her condition, nor did she contact the pastor, the Rev. Cedric Rodney.

The church, which traces its roots to Salem and is the city's only black Moravian congregation, has about 75 members. AIDS just isn't discussed at St. Philips, Bailey said.

Rodney agreed. "Black people don't talk about AIDS. It has to do with sex, and black people don't talk openly about sex."

Rodney, who is also the James A. Gray professor of religion and ethics at Winston-Salem State, fought for civil rights during the 1960s. While a few pastors were taking up AIDS as a new cause in 1997, Rodney was not one of them.

Dolby apparently believed in educating ministers and everyone else about AIDS. She was too sick to push AIDS education here, her mother said.

But in Philadelphia, she said, her daughter had served on discussion panels about the disease, even after AIDS caused her weight to drop below 100 pounds and left her in a wheelchair. Although Dolby didn't say she had AIDS during those discussions, her mother said it was obvious she was not well.

Black people of faith say they battle fear and rumors as they try to educate their churches about AIDS. Gray said he did so as he trained the AIDS team for his church. "After you break the fear barrier, you can just teach people how to love."

Gray took a course on teaching AIDS education at the local chapter of the American Red Cross. The course is no longer offered here, partially because of a lack of interest, said Laura Allen, the director of health and safety for the local chapter.

In their book Somebody's Knocking At Your Door, the Rev. Ronald Weatherford of High Point and his wife, Carole Boston Weatherford, encourage black congregations and their leaders to educate themselves about AIDS and to invite AIDS patients to make speeches to them. The Rev. Weatherford, who is black, is a United Methodist minister.

White tries to help black church leaders nationwide with education through confidential seminars that he calls "AIDS 101." "We're about trying to dispel the myths about AIDS," he said, and many black churches are starting to listen to him and other activists.

For example, Grace United Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem has held workshops on general health care that have included AIDS education, said the Rev. Sam Stevenson of the church, and has invited AIDS patients to talk to them. Phillips Chapel Baptist Church here has also held workshops on AIDS education and has an open-door policy on counseling, said the Rev. Ray Watlington of the church.

Eversley's church offers youth courses on human sexuality that include information about AIDS.

Attitudes, however, are slow to change.

Eversley says he retains reservations about the potential effects of having a large number of gay people join his church. "I don't have a real interest in having a lot of homosexuals joining my church. I have a strong commitment to black-male leadership development.

"I have to make my priorities. I realize there's some hypocrisy for me."

Sammie Gray was by Dolby's bedside on the day she died, Dec. 6, 1997.

"I was rubbing her feet. She was talking about how she was glad her mom got out of the house, and then she said, 'I'm tired.' " Gray said.

Bailey had gone to a store with Inez Gray. Later that day, she planned to put up their Christmas tree.

That plan and numerous others crashed as she approached her house and saw an ambulance out front. In the house, Sammie Gray told Bailey that her daughter had died. Bailey collapsed to the floor, crying. About 10 minutes later, she pulled herself up and walked into her daughter's bedroom.

"I'd never held anyone or kissed anyone who had died. But I sat down for over an hour in her room. I rocked her and cradled her and kissed her," she said.

Sammie Gray said: "I had to tell her to let her go."

Doctors ruled the cause of death as AIDS-related pneumonia.

Bailey arranged for her daughter's funeral to be at St. Philips, and asked Rodney to conduct the service.

While they hadn't talked about AIDS with church members or Rodney, Bailey said it was still their church.

Friends and family packed the small, picturesque brick church for the funeral.

Many of them knew what Dolby had died of, but no one mentioned the disease.
Now, Bailey wishes she had asked Rodney to mention AIDS during the service to focus attention on the illness. If her daughter had known more about the disease, she said, "she probably would have been even more afraid of sex."

A year-and-a-half later, Dolby's death at 29 still haunts her mother. She thinks about how her daughter told her she'd have to be strong after she was gone. "Really, I don't know how I'm sitting here today. It's got to be because of Angela and God."

In the long days and nights that have followed her daughter's death, Bailey said, some relatives have drawn away, telling her that she depresses them. "How do you just bottle up tears?"

She didn't feel comfortable at St. Philips talking about her daughter's death. She joined a new church, Zion Memorial Baptist.

Bailey lost touch with the Union Baptist team, which has faced its own struggles. Dolby's death left them drained, Gray said.

Team members are not caring for any AIDS patients now, although they hope to get a referral soon. In their work, the Rev. Lewis said, they're trying to break down barriers of fear.

Bailey wants to break down the barriers as well. And she wants others to join her on her journey. She plans to begin volunteering with AIDS Care Service, and she has started telling people about her daughter's death. She hopes that black churches will listen and take action.

Rodney, however, has no plans to take up the issue at his church. He said he doesn't think of AIDS as God's curse and he doesn't buy into any myths about it. He said he believes that ministers should relate to their congregation members with AIDS just as they'd relate to any sick member.

"If somebody comes to me with AIDS and begins to talk, sure I'll become emotionally involved, but I've never been given that opportunity." Not have any members of his congregation asked him to tackle AIDS as an issue, he said, and he doesn't plan to push them.

Bailey, however, said she wishes that Rodney and other ministers would battle AIDS. "You would think that a church, with their belief in God and their support for one another, that they could help."

"It's just a real problem that's been swept under the rug. It's come by and taken my Angela, just like it's taken so many people."

"I'll never be ashamed to say how Angela died. It's a disease that's here."

CAPTION: PAGE 1: 1. LEILA BAILEY, HOLDS BACK TEARS AS SHE CRADLES A PHOTOGRAPH OF HER DAUGHTER AND ONLY CHILD, ANGELA DOLBY. (ROLFE)
2. SAMMIE GRAY: "I HAD TO TELL HER TO LET HER GO." (ENGLISH)
PAGE 10: LEILA BAILEY, WHO LOST HER ONLY CHILD TO AIDS, SAYS THAT AIDS IS A PROBLEM THAT "HAS BEEN SWEPT UNDER THE RUG." (ROLFE)
SEEDS OF FAITH
THE CHURCHES THAT TOBACCO BUILT ARE STRUGGLING TO RECONCILE THEIR FAITH AND THE HARD TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAS BEEN PAYING THE BILLS

KING

Even in the gray of winter, the trip to Chestnut Grove United Methodist Church is a journey through a rich heartland.

The road to the church slices through tobacco fields, the red dirt awaiting another year’s planting. Pilot Mountain stands tall in the distance, a landmark and anchor for the people living in its shadow.

Chestnut Grove is a tobacco church, built from the sweat and generosity of generations of tobacco farmers and the communities they supported. Here, on some of the state’s richest soil, the golden leaf has meant money in the bank, college educations for children, and late-model cars in the garage.

And for the church just outside King, tobacco has also meant comfort, social outreach — and faith.

But the mounting pressure on tobacco means changes at Chestnut Grove and other tobacco churches. Although similar to the secular debate about tobacco, the discussions at Chestnut Grove are more subtle, built around consensus, prayer and a keen understanding of the role tobacco has played in the 141-year-old house of worship.

The minister and his congregation embody the struggle that many churches in the Tobacco Belt face.

"It comes down to striking a balance," said the Rev. Bill Berry of Chestnut Grove. Since becoming the pastor at the church last summer, Berry has quietly and subtly inserted the tobacco question into his ministry.

But not all church leaders want to get entangled in this debate. How do you weigh concerns about the raising of a product most people consider harmful against worries about the economic well-being of farmers, tobacco workers and their communities? There is ample scripture to support either view. And there is the money, which has built fellowship halls and sanctuaries across the state.

So perhaps not surprisingly, instead of debate, there is often silence.

"North Carolina churches have not been very courageous, I would say, in dealing with the question," said the Rev. Collins Kilburn, the executive director of the North Carolina Council of Churches. He wants churches to study and discuss the matter, to raise questions about the marketing of cigarettes to children in Third World countries and to help farmers find alternative crops.

But if the council of churches, with its activist agenda, sees the tobacco issue in black and white, ministers like Berry see gray. For them, the issue is complex and personal.

Minister quit smoking
At 46, Berry is well aware of the role tobacco has played in his own life.

He quit smoking in 1982 after his father, a smoker, contracted emphysema. His father died of lung cancer in 1990.

Berry was educated at Duke Divinity School, an institution tobacco money helped build.

He grew up in the Northeast, and had careers in the U.S. Coast Guard and in banking before becoming a minister. He had felt a spiritual pull to the ministry even before the Coast Guard, he said, but resisted it because he wasn’t sure he could handle issues of life and death.

While in divinity school, he served Asheboro’s Giles Chapel United Methodist, another church built on tobacco. After graduation from divinity school, he became the associate pastor at Mount Tabor United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, which has factory workers and executives from R.J. Reynolds
Tobacco Co. on its membership rolls.

In The Book of Discipline, Berry's denomination recommends abstinence from tobacco. But the book also affirms the rural lifestyle that tobacco farmers enjoy.

Berry became the minister of Chestnut Grove church in July; he also serves Bethel United Methodist Church in King.

At Chestnut Grove, Berry said, he found a special congregation. "It's a church where touching is important, and being in connection, and eye contact."

At the congregation's encouragement, Berry walks the center aisle as he preaches. A big man in a white robe, he steps softly across the carpet, occasionally pausing to hold his hand on a parishioner's shoulder for a moment.

He serves a congregation of 160 people active in social outreach in the community. It is also a congregation with many members adamant in their defense of tobacco.

Many church members no longer farm themselves, but they lease their tobacco allotments to large-scale farmers. Such arrangements can mean several thousand dollars a year to the lessee - the difference between making ends meet and not.

Chestnut Grove members don't want their minister to criticize tobacco. Only once, recalled longtime member Ellis Boyles, did one of his ministers do that from the pulpit.

That was in the 1960s, he said, and the late Worth Gentry, a tobacco farmer and state representative, told the minister after the service that such talk would not be tolerated. The minister didn't bring up the subject again.

Today, many members proudly tick off the names of grandfathers and great-grandfathers who farmed tobacco.

One member, Alton Bowen, tells the story of how his grandfather started out as a tenant farmer and worked his way up to prosperity as a land-owning tobacco farmer. "I kind of think it's a person's prerogative, whether they want to smoke or use tobacco," Bowen said, echoing the thoughts of many in his church. A nonsmoker, Bowen makes his living by teaching at South Stokes High School. He leases out the family tobacco allotment, and gives the profits to his mother.

Other Chestnut Grove members, like 82-year-old Frances Jones, depend on income from their allotment lease. A widow, she worries that the pressure on tobacco will cause her to lose her allotment, her only income aside from Social Security. "It's getting to be sort of fierce times," she said.

Chestnut Grove families who continue to farm their allotments, like Mary Frances Joyce, say that tobacco farming is all they know and that they're too old to learn a new way to make a living.

In such an atmosphere, congregation members like Dennie Charland, Betty Joe McGee and Norma Edwards, who have health concerns about tobacco, don't often raise the issue. "I know the farmer has to have something to do, but personally, I wouldn't smoke cigarettes myself," said Edwards, a semi-retired housecleaner whose husband died of lung cancer.

Berry said of tobacco farming: "It has been accepted so long. it's sort of hard to realize it's not accepted anymore."

Still, there have been a few concessions to changing times. There's no smoking in the new fellowship hall, which opened in 1992. Church members deferred to others who are bothered by smoke and also wanted to protect the carpet from ash burns.

Berry has no plans to preach against tobacco from his pulpit. But he sees trouble ahead for his Chestnut Grove congregation and his Bethel congregation, which contains many R.J. Reynolds workers.

Many of the members at Chestnut Grove have already shifted to other occupations, Berry said, from teaching school to serving as paramedics. But he also knows many of them depend on the income from their allotments. "I think when the allotments get cut and that sort of thing, there's going to be a little more pressure," he said.

So he raises tobacco concerns softly, and typically in individual chats with congregation members. Sometimes, he does so by mentioning his father's emphysema, and how that illness prompted him to quit smoking. "That really brought it home," Berry said.

But in such chats, Berry never points an accusing finger at tobacco farmers. He explained the standards by which he works: "First, do no harm. Not to hurt people, but to bring them along and educate them. My focus in ministry really is nurturing."

Even in his low-key approach, those who study the issue say, Berry is doing more than many local church leaders, who aren't dealing with the tobacco issue at all. "Too often, I think churches wait and kind of see what's going to happen," said the Rev. Ben Poage, a Disciples of Christ minister who lives in Richmond, Ky.

He counsels tobacco farmers in his state through the rough times and has compiled and edited two handbooks on dealing with the issue.

"The answer may lie in being audacious enough to take the first step, it may lie in not allowing the enormity of the task to immobilize the effort, or it may lie in taking God's great commission seriously enough to do something . . . The larger church must not allow local tobacco-church congregations to become frozen in their response. They need leadership, prayer and financial support," Poage writes in his second handbook, The Tobacco Church II.
Southern Baptist resolution
At high levels, some mainline denominations have been moving against tobacco for years.

In 1984, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a nonbinding resolution that encouraged farmers to quit growing tobacco and Baptists in general to stop using the product. But in a response to the statement, the general board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina said that a continued decline in tobacco production would result in economic turmoil and raises moral and ethical questions. The board concluded that members of the state convention should use "prayerful and thoughtful consideration" in reaching their own decisions about tobacco.

Last summer in Charlotte, delegates to the annual meeting of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a resolution urging the federal government to raise cigarette taxes and ban cigarette vending machines. The resolution also expressed compassion and concern for tobacco farmers, and urged the enactment of federal and state legislation to help those involved in tobacco find other ways to make a living. Members of the committee who passed the resolution said they wanted to offer support to tobacco farmers, but differed on how to offer that support.

Locally, Presbyterian congregations are not raising the tobacco issue.

Other mainline denominations face similar situations, said the Rev. Valerie Rosenquist, because policy makers don't realize the complexity of the tobacco issue. "Most of the mainstream denominations have policies that condemn tobacco use and production. And somewhere else they'll have this wonderful statement supporting rural life. Never the twain shall meet."

Rosenquist is a Methodist minister and the assistant director of the rural-church division of the Duke Endowment in Durham. The endowment, which got some of its original funding from tobacco money, now tries to help tobacco farmers wean themselves from their cash crop.

In the early 1980s, members of the Council of Churches researched and wrote a study that explored the complexities of the tobacco issue.

The study cited 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, which includes the line, "Do you not know that your body is a temple?" It also referred to Romans 14:21: "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

The researchers wrote: "If the use of tobacco by others is injurious to their health, then our production, advertising, and modeling of its use must be of concern to Christians." But the study also cited Matthew 25:31-40, which includes the line: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

"If reduction in tobacco use and production would bring hardship to some North Carolinians, especially to farmers and business people unable to influence circumstances far beyond their control, then Christian churches must be concerned," the study said.

The report was meant to spark discussion among churches but was instead met with silence, Kilburn said. "Not any of them wanted to touch it. It's very clear that it's a health hazard, and churches should have been pointing that out through the years and holding that up, but we haven't."

Rosenquist said: "I think it's just way too sensitive, and I think in many ways it's overwhelming. But it has such a direct bearing on normal, everyday people in the congregation. These are not evil people."

She is writing a book about churches and tobacco, and she tries to raise awareness of the issue by encouraging discussion on the subject in classes she teaches at Duke Divinity School. Her division of the Duke Endowment contributes $50,000 annually to the Tobacco Community Project of the Rural Advancement Foundation International-U.S.A., a nonprofit agency based in Pittsboro.

The tobacco issue is a hard one for churches to grasp, Poage said. He explained that churches have been almost shut out of negotiations between cigarette manufacturers and the government on financial aid to farmers. "The tobacco industry would not like to deal with farmers at all, much less the church."

Ed King, the church liaison for RAFI's Tobacco Community Project, is reaching out to tobacco farmers in Eastern North Carolina through churches. He is sponsoring community forums and trying to get church and community leaders involved in the search for solutions. Possible answers include RAFI's cost-share grants to farmers to help them phase out tobacco and concentrate on livestock and other crops that many of them are already growing.

It's a pilot program, and RAFI officials would like it to be an example of what farmers can do with their share of the national settlement with tobacco companies, a share that is expected to be a few billion dollars. But starting the pilot program has not been easy, King said. "There's a lot of denial."

Betty Bailey, RAFI's executive director, said that tobacco farmers are often the backbones of their communities, the folks who make the volunteer fire departments and school boards run. "When all of a sudden their world gets turned upside down, they have a hard time talking about it."

Denominational policies against tobacco make farmers uncomfortable, she said. "There's an understandable tension with the farmers, who feel like they've been the foundation of these churches, and now the church is slapping them in the face by saying what they do is immoral."

Church should stay out
Some Chestnut Grove members say that the church should stay out of the tobacco issue. Others, like Dennie Charlton, disagree. "It would seem like a normal extension to go into your church and community and do what you can," she said.
Small churches such as Chestnut Grove lack the money to provide much financial help. Bailey, however, said that local churches can do plenty, even without a lot of money. "The churches should be a part, saying, 'How is this community going to survive and thrive?' and 'How do people keep their spiritual soundness and sanity during this time of tremendous change?' If tobacco's in trouble, the membership of the church is in trouble."

Sunday school teachers can focus on tobacco, Bailey said, and church leaders can encourage members to help farmers focus on other crops by buying those crops directly from the farmers. Churches can also offer psychological counseling and comfort to farmers, she said. And churches are ideal refuges for open talks about tobacco, Poage said. "The church is the one place where they can get together on the same ground and, hopefully, a place where they're not going to be condemned, a place where they can honestly share their feelings and their hopes and fears."

Chestnut Grove members like Odell Edwards continue to defend tobacco. He is a retired farmer who lets another man work his allotment in exchange for a share of the profits. At 77, Edwards has emphysema and struggles for breath, but he continues to smoke. He insists that his illness came from chemicals on tobacco and not from tobacco itself.

He lives on tobacco land that his family has worked for more than 100 years. He wants to retain his family's way of life, but he's not sure how to do that. "If they keep cutting our allotments, something's going to have to be done."

Berry listens to Edwards and the rest of his congregation, offering subtle support as needed. What finally caused him to surrender to the call of the ministry, he said, was John Wesley's writings on grace, or God's unconditional love. Wesley founded the movement that became Methodism. He saw life as a grace-filled journey, Berry said. That grace will see him and his church through the tobacco crisis, Berry said.

"God is never through working with us."

CAPTION: PAGE 1: 1. TOBACCO HAS BEEN CENTRAL TO THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO GO TO CHESNUT GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN KING - AND TO THE CHURCH ITSELF. 2. THE REV. BILL BERRY DOES NOT SHY AWAY FROM THE ISSUE OF TOBACCO, BUT HIS APPROACH IS LOW-KEY. HIS CONGREGATION IS NOT OF ONE MIND ON THE SUBJECT. PAGE 8: THE CONGREGATION APPRECIATES BERRY WALKING AMONG THEM WHEN HE PREACHES. "IT'S A CHURCH WHERE TOUCHING IS IMPORTANT," HE SAYS.
MISSION IMPERATIVE
TARHEEL DELEGATION TO HONDURAS PUTS ANOTHER DROP IN THE BUCKET
A NEED TO HELP KEEPS CHRISTIANS HEADING INTO THE FIELDS

EL CORPUS, HONDURAS
Max Walser and Chip Blower of Lexington stood sweating in a small store in the Honduran backcountry, waiting for light.

Then, someone threw a switch and a small stream of light fell across the store's modest racks of food and into its dusty corners. Walser and Blower exchanged glances with a group of farmers standing around them. They all broke into smiles, temporarily bridging the language barrier between the Tarheels and the farmers.

Walser and Blower had helped install a solar-power system in the mountain store, a tiny act aimed at chipping away at massive problems in a Central American country flooded with foreigners offering similar small acts of help. Six months after Hurricane Mitch, Honduras has become one of the hottest destinations for the jet-age generation of U.S. Christians trying to help their fellow man. Like thousands of folks in previous generations, Walser and Blower were in the foreign mission field, looking for smiles, hope and deeper meaning to their own lives. Like many before them, they were beneficiaries of the American Dream trying to help strangers whose own sweat and tears have bought only nightmares. The North Carolinians had come to a steamy, largely unpaved world of haunting eyes and strange words, but a world just an easy flight of only several hours away.

Walser, Blower and the 25 other members of their group from Grace Episcopal Church in Lexington tried not to fool themselves. "We'd be less than honest if we didn't say we do this to make ourselves feel good. But we also want to help our fellow man," said Walser, a former superintendent of the Davidson County schools.

And realistically, Blower said, the approximately $800 he spent on the trip might have gone further if he'd just sent it to a relief organization, especially given the low cost of labor in Honduras.

The Lexington group installed solar panels and planned to build and repair a few houses, a small dent in damages estimated at more than $3 billion in Honduras, the poorest country in Central America and the one hardest hit by Mitch. More than 6,000 of its residents died in the hurricane, and thousands are still missing in its wake, washed out to sea or buried in mud.

It is also a country with a gentle, resilient character all its own. You have to see Honduras, said Blower, a 53-year-old field service engineer.

As any mission-trip veteran can tell you, you can hit some mind-stretching experiences on such trips. That happened for the Lexington group, who flew out of Greensboro April 9 and was set to return today.

They didn't evangelize to their new Catholic friends, although one of the members talked about how the trip had drawn their own group closer to God. But mostly they talked about drawing closer to man - and buying into a dream of financial independence cherished by a small group of farmers in the El Corpus area of southern Honduras.

Doctoral research in Honduras
The Lexington group's mission to Honduras is grounded in the work of Jeff Boyer, an anthropologist at Appalachian State University in Boone. Boyer lived in the town of El Corpus in the late 1970s while doing research for his doctorate. He is also an Episcopalian and has gotten the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina involved in helping the residents of the El Corpus area. Boyer has led several work and study groups to that area.

Through church connections, Walser heard of Boyer's work. Walser had been involved in small mission projects in other countries. He and Boyer began to talk about a mission to Honduras.

With Boyer's help, Walser began to plan a trip to El Corpus with fellow members of Grace Episcopal and friends from Boone, Raleigh and Greensboro. Group members paid several hundred dollars each for plane tickets, and shots and pills to protect their health. Walser raised supplies and money to support their work.

They would work with members of the United Communities, a grass-roots movement of Hondurans.
dedicated to economic independence for the country's farmers. Boyer has worked with the group since its inception eight years ago.

Boyer did not go on this trip, but Hondurans would often ask members of the group about the man they knew respectfully as "Don Boyer."

By the time their plane touched down in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa that Friday afternoon, the group members were excited, happy that the work finally seemed close at hand. But as they sweated outside the airport in the Honduran heat, grim realities set in.

Small, ragged boys with dead stares approached them with outstretched hands, begging for money. Human-rights activists say that the numbers of such young beggars have increased on the streets of Central American cities since the hurricane.

Most of the North Carolinians reluctantly turned away. They felt that if they gave to one, they'd have to give to many. And on a mission aimed at economic independence and self-sufficiency, they didn't want to encourage begging.

But not every member of the group was able to stick to that theory. Remo Piracchi, a wood craftsman from Boone, discreetly gave to some of the beggars.

At the airport, the group members climbed into a chartered bus for the journey to El Corpus, a 450-year-old town of almost 1,000 people about 80 miles from Tegucigalpa.

In a previous age, it was frequently a struggle for missionaries to get to remote areas. No more. The jet age has made quick opportunities for international service limitless. Members of the Lexington group said they decided on El Corpus because Boyer and other members of their denomination had already established a presence in the area.

For many, taking part in a mission trip was a first. And there are strong connections between Honduras and North Carolina, one member said. Aaron Pell, a 27-year-old interpreter for the group, lived in El Corpus a few years ago while working with United Communities. He's now a Raleigh electrician and recently worked at a building site with at least 30 Hondurans - including one he knew from El Corpus.

As the battered American school bus groaned slowly into the Honduran countryside on winding mountain roads, group members stared out the windows, taking in a weary country of skinny dogs and heavy hearts, of bread baking in stone ovens and women walking by the road with baskets of fruit on their heads. They took in a land of sparkling rivers and hazy vistas, of breathtaking beauty and crushing poverty.

Mitch dealt yet another blow to Hondurans. But the country is rebounding, said Venancio Montoya, 40, the manager of United Communities. There is a spirit of hard work, and also a sense that a lot of things are going to get done, Montoya, speaking through an interpreter, told some of the bus passengers.

During stops on their six-hour journey to El Corpus, the Americans began to see flashes of that hope in playing children, or in the smiles of their proud parents. "We'll probably learn more from them than they learn from us," said the Rev. Bob Cook of Grace Episcopal.

Arrival in El Corpus

They arrived in El Corpus about 8 p.m., after a cooling darkness had descended. As the bus rumbled up and down the cobblestone streets of the town, residents stared from the open doorways of modest adobe houses with roofs of red-clay tile. The bus stopped at the home of Juana Lainez, the El Corpus organizer of the mission.

Lainez divided the group into small parties, each of which was assigned to a different family with which to stay. El Corpus would serve as a base for work expeditions in the surrounding countryside.

Many of the North Carolinians awoke before dawn to the crowing of roosters and the blaring horn of a public bus. They planted their feet on cool tile floors, then stumbled outdoors to outhouses and, if they were lucky, a shower of a few trickling drops of cold water. After their host families served them plates of tortillas, melon and fruit juices, they walked the town.

The white visitors from a state with a rapidly growing Hispanic population suddenly realized what it was like to be in the minority, wrestling with a culture and language they didn't understand. Some of the town's residents called them gringos, although the residents said they meant the term to be affectionate.

The visitors watched the majority, following their lead by offering gentle greetings of hola and buenos dias.

John Morehouse, a 26-year-old social worker from Raleigh and friend of Boyer's, served as one of the group's three interpreters, helping the North Carolinians with their broken Spanish. But he also knew that some communication doesn't require words. "Smiles are the same wherever you are," he said.

As they tried to communicate, the North Carolinians wondered how Hondurans get by on so little. For example, a Honduran roofer makes the equivalent of $7 a day.

"There's a lot that groups going down there learn about simple living," Pell said. "People here are just trying to be simple farmers. People don't want to be what we are in the states. They just want to own a piece of land, raise their own crops and raise a family."

But Sallie Lacy, a Peace Corps volunteer in the El Corpus area, isn't so sure that Hondurans are content to live simply. Some Hondurans buy televisions as soon as they get enough money, and many of them want to go to the United States, said Lacy, who grew up in Greensboro.

Planning for the week

The group gathered at Lainez's house Saturday to plan their week.

As a volunteer coordinator for United Communities, Lainez is a part of a new wave of female leaders in a
country dominated by men. She is 32, a schoolteacher and mother of two.

Walser, an aggressive leader, free with laughs and commands, went silent to listen to his Honduran counterpart.

Lainez explained the work of United Communities to the group. United Communities seeks to eliminate the middlemen known locally as Los Coyotes, who prey on farmers, she said. The middlemen loan farmers grain or money at exorbitant rates against pending harvests, she said, and the farmers often end up with nothing after harvest. Some farmers become so indebted that they lose their land.

The "coyotes" are the latest in a long line of increasingly severe threats to Honduran farmers who have worked the country's land for more than 3,000 years, through the Spanish conquest in the 1500s, the liberation from Spain in 1821, to today's trying times. Corporate interests, some from the United States, have bought up large chunks of land, Boyer explained. Consequently, he said, small farmers have had increasingly less land to work to provide for a population that has grown to 6 million people.

United Communities seeks to help by setting up funds the farmers can borrow from and by setting up facilities where farmers can store their own grain. "Right now, we're becoming a bit of a competition for this coyote system," Lainez said through an interpreter.

Saturday night, Cook led a communion service at Lainez's house. They did not invite outsiders, not wanting to offend the town's Catholic priest, who works from a church that dates back to the town's Spanish settlers in the mid-1500s.

Although Episcopalians have been in Honduras for about 135 years, said the Rev. Frank Lyons of Tegucigalpa, they have limited their evangelical efforts in the predominantly Catholic country. "Our mission strategy has not been to step on anybody's toes, basically."

Many of the other Christian groups working in Honduras are more aggressive. For example, Baptist missionaries provide for basic needs such as food and shelter, then encourage Bible study, said Joan Furr, a Southern Baptist missionary in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, she said, is like a harvest field. "They're turning to God, now, a lot of them."

Furr and her husband, Max, are former members of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.

Members of the Lexington group chose to follow their denomination's subtle style of working in Honduras.

"I can't speak for the whole Episcopal church, but we try to respect a wide variety of ways people worship God," said Beth McKee-Huger of Greensboro. "God loves. If we can demonstrate that by what we do, that's what we're coming at."

During the service Saturday night, members of the Lexington group talked about their trip and what they had learned so far. Cook said he could feel God's presence in the families that the group had felt touched by.

Peggy Walser, who is married to Max Walser, said she'd had a special feeling since arriving in El Corpus.

"I have been amazed at the peace I have felt."

They ended by singing "Amazing Grace."

Last Sunday, the group members split into four parties, each bound for a different community in the El Corpus area where they would live and work with the residents for the next several days. Each of the communities belongs to the United Communities organization. The first solar-power system that Walser and Blower helped install was at a United Communities store and grain-storage facility in the community of Papolon. The installation took about 2 1/2 hours. Afterward, Walser led his party to the community of Espaveles, where they installed another system at a building that housed a Catholic church, a United Communities store and a grain-storage area.

In the days to come, the members of the farmers' group may gather in some of the United Communities buildings illuminated by the solar-power systems the Tarheels have installed. They may express hope their plans will work, especially as they approach the beginning of their winter season next month, a time of heavy rains that could wash more rocks and mud down from the mountains, threatening their harvest.

And maybe they will talk about their friends from Lexington, the one group of hundreds of mission groups spilling into their country that fate or God brought to them. Perhaps they will talk about the group's plan to return, to try to make their trip mean more than just a 10-day pass through the lives of foreigners.

"We'll be back," Walser said.

CAPTION: PAGE 1: 1. A YOUNG BEGGAR SLEEPS AND ANOTHER HUDDLES NEXT TO A WALL IN THE Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa.

2. Max Walser, a retired school superintendent, is surrounded by children outside the town of El Corpus. He rounded up supplies and raised money to support the group's work in Honduras.

MAP - A MISSION TO HONDURAS


2. Juana Lainez, the El Corpus organizer of the mission trip, shows the damage that Hurricane Mitch did to a house in her town.

3. Her daughter, Andrea Corrales, and Ariel Betancourt play a game with Lee Walser of Lexington.

4. A Roman Catholic church founded in the 1500s dominates the El Corpus town square.
SPIRITED GROWTH
MANY HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS DRAWN TO CHARISMATIC CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." -- Acts 2:1-4.

They have come from the parched plains and crowded cities of Latin America to this refuge, a white-washed, cinder-block church nestled in red earth off South Main Street.

They begin worshipping soon after dawn Sundays in this building that once served as a three-car garage. For hours, the crowd grows as new cars and old ones roll into the gravel parking lot of Iglesia Nueva Vida, or New Life Church. Many of the cars have such bumper stickers as Jesus es nuestra paz (Jesus is our peace).

By the time the sun is high, the parking lot is packed. A few late arrivals walk toward the church, and a man sprinkles sparkling drops of oil on them as they enter. Sounds drift out: tapping tambourines, guitar twangs, drum beats and hundreds of voices singing in Spanish.

These are the sights and sounds of something new. These are the sights and sounds of big hopes, big dreams and fresh faith in a new land, a faith that includes the "gifts of the spirit"; speaking in tongues, faith healing, prophesying and the casting out of demons. These are the images of something larger as well, a religious movement sweeping the world.

Iglesia Nueva Vida is a Pentecostal church, one of thousands of such churches springing up as the Pentecostal, or charismatic, movement challenges mainline Christian churches.

There are now charismatic Catholic and Episcopal churches in other parts of this country, and in the Third World, charismatic Moravian churches. In Forsyth County, members of a Disciples of Christ church, Greater Cleveland Avenue Christian, say they have followed God to become charismatic. Along the way, their church has become one of the largest black churches in the county.

The movement takes its cue from the day of Pentecost described in Acts, in which the followers of Jesus were said to have received his Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism began in the early days of this century, and is booming on the eve of the new millennium. Pentecostal revivals in Pensacola, Fla., and Smithton, Mo., are drawing thousands of worshipers weekly. There are about 500 million charismatic or Pentecostal worshipers in the world, scholars say.

The movement is especially popular among Hispanics.

Many Hispanic immigrants become Pentecostal in their new homes here, often shedding the Catholic faith their families had known for generations. In charismatic churches, they say, they come to really know Christ. And charismatic churches offer them a sense of community, they say.

Iglesia Nueva Vida, started 11 years ago, has rapidly become one of the largest Pentecostal Hispanic churches in the area, with as many as 400 worshipers packing the church on Sunday. The congregation is building an 8,800-square-foot, $400,000 sanctuary that members hope to open in the new year on their South Main Street property. The church has also established its own denomination, Ministerio Cristiano Iglesias en Vision, or Christian Mission Churches with Vision.

The denomination, led by the Rev. Jose Vazquez, has several small churches stretching to Mexico.

There's an urgency to their work, Vazquez said, because Jesus is coming soon. "We're going to meet him in the clouds," said Vazquez, 43.

Filled with the Holy Spirit
Standing outside a recent service at Iglesia Nueva Vida, Miguel Sanchez tried to explain Pentecostalism to a visitor. Sanchez, a thin 13-year-old, remembered a recent night when, he said, the Holy Spirit filled him. He fell onto the gravel parking lot and began to roll around and cry, he said. He said that a friend put
her hand on his shoulder, repeating the words: 'The Lord is with you.'"
Sanchez's eyes flashed, and he began to speak quickly as he continued with his story.
"I was talking languages. I was crying. That's just the power of God," said Sanchez, who was born in
Mexico.
He and other worshipers describe a faith in which Christ is close and intense.
In the sanctuary, Sanchez's fellow church members were worshiping. A few hundred of them were
standing, swaying almost as one to a thumping Latin hymn as a musician played an organ and a small girl
pounded bongo drums. Many of the worshipers closed their eyes and smiled, seemingly going to a holy
place of peace all their own.
Fathers raised both calloused hands in the air and mothers raised one, cradling their babies with the other
hand. Other babies sat in portable car seats up and down the aisles.
A woman began to twirl in the aisle between the car seats, shouting words of praise.
Other men and women began to jump up and down. Vazquez capped the service with an intense sermon.
He paced the stage and sliced the air with his arms as he talked.
This is a place, the worshipers say, where services last for hours as they lose track of time and lose
themselves in their Lord. "You can feel the Holy Ghost," Vazquez said. This is a place, the worshipers say,
where they become filled with the spirit of a God who works miracles.
Vazquez said that he and church members have "cast demons out" of people by praying for them. And
God has used him and other church members to heal the sick through "the laying on of hands," he said.
Vazquez and his wife, Ruth, said that the church itself grew out of a prophecy.
In a Pentecostal church in Charlotte in 1988, Ruth Vazquez said, a stranger told her she would minister to
people of different countries.
"I wondered if I was going to go to all these places," she said.
She knew that she and her husband had long been led by God, she said.
She grew up in Puerto Rico and New York, the daughter of a Pentecostal associate pastor.
Her husband grew up in Puerto Rico without religion.
At the age of 19, he stepped into a Pentecostal church in Humacao, Puerto Rico. There, he said, he found
Jesus. "I felt happy. I felt free."
Vazquez got an associate degree in business management from the University of Puerto Rico and came to
the United States in 1985. He worked in business and read his Bible at night.
After his wife told him of the stranger's prophecy in the Charlotte church, Vazquez said, he realized it fit
with a leading he had to minister to his fellow Hispanics.
Iglesia Nueva Vida began as a Hispanic congregation within New Life Assembly of God Church on Link
Road. In 1993, the Hispanic congregation moved to South Main Street, and the next year, Iglesia Nueva
Vida broke off from the Assemblies of God denomination.
Vazquez and the Rev. Beechard Moorefield, the minister of New Life Church, say that their parting was a
friendly one. His church just needed to grow, Vazquez said, and could do that more easily on its own.
Members began flocking to the new church. One of those members was Matthew P. Murray Jr. His wife
was raised in Panama, and he is the only Anglo member of the congregation.
Murray began attending the church in 1994, soon after it moved to the South Main Street site that
includes classroom buildings and a kitchen. Like many church members, he left the Catholic church for
Pentecostalism. He says he found a closer relationship with Christ in Pentecostalism.
On any given Sunday, he is at Iglesia Nueva Vida, raising his hands in the air, shouting words of praise at
the top of his lungs and walking through the dense crowds. "This is where God wants me," said Murray, an
elder whom members of the church call "Matteo."
The church concentrates on evangelism rather than social outreach. "Once you have met that spiritual
need, everything else falls into place," said Ruth Vazquez.
Vazquez, her husband, church member Abraham Alvarez, associate pastor Ramon Rodriguez and other
church leaders have carefully built up the church membership. They have divided the city's Hispanic
communities into sections that church teams canvass, sometimes going door to door and inviting residents
to worship with them. Alvarez, a 42-year-old immigrant from Mexico who leads church-evangelism
efforts, picks up worshipers in his van and brings them to Iglesia Nueva Vida.
Alvarez and other church members also hold religious classes for children in Hispanic neighborhoods
such as Lakeside Apartments on New Walkertown Road.
"Sometimes we reach the parents through the kids," Ruth Vazquez said.
Members of Iglesia Nueva Vida also minister to men and women in the Forsyth County Jail.
Some local Catholics say privately that members of Iglesia Nueva Vida criticize Catholicism as they
evangelize. Members of Iglesia Nueva Vida deny that. "There's plenty of work to do, so we're not much
about competing with one another," Murray said.
But there are, members of Iglesia Nueva Vida say, marked differences between their faith and
Catholicism.
Vazquez said: "Many people don't really know Jesus. They go to church out of custom, but their life is
not something different. Their life needs something to change.
"They find this change in the Pentecostal church. For many years, they have been Catholic in name
only."
Lee Grady, the editor of Charisma, an Orlando magazine that covers the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, said: "Here's what goes on: Some charismatic groups may sound mean-spirited when they talk about Catholics; others are genuinely compassionate and loving. In a prayer room, they're going to say, 'We love Catholics, but you need to understand that Catholics worship idols.' It's a very complicated situation."

Catholics say they worship only God. Non-Catholics sometimes misunderstand the purpose of statues in Catholic churches, they say.

Searching for miracles
Iglesia Nueva Vida is one of many Pentecostal Hispanic groups nationwide, Grady said. "You're going to see it more and more."

Of the 31 million Hispanics in the nation, he said, about 10 percent are evangelical Christians - not counting evangelical Catholics. And he believes that many Hispanic evangelicals are charismatic, particularly the newer immigrants.

The Rev. Fermin Bocanegra of Forsyth County said that many of the immigrants, at least the ones from South America, turned to the Pentecostal movement in their native countries in a search for miracles. "In South America, you have to realize, they have very poor socio-economic status. They really see not much hope in government and in the system, and the Pentecostals and the charismatics, they always preach miracles. This has always been enticing to these people.

"We don't have good doctors, we don't have good medicine in South America. So there is nowhere else to go except to God."

Bocanegra is the minister of Iglesia Cristiana Wesleyana, a Kernersville church that is not charismatic.

Tessie Devore, the director of Vida Cristiana magazine in Orlando, said: "Latinos are just naturally charismatic. That's what they're about." She is Hispanic, and her magazine covers Hispanic Christianity.

The Rev. Galo Maldonado of Forsyth County, however, said that Hispanics are not "naturally charismatic." "Our emotions are different, because of the culture from which we came. Your feet start moving when you hear some Latin music. But it's the rhythm, not the spirit."

Maldonado ministers to a Hispanic congregation within the predominantly white Beck's Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.

Such churches as Iglesia Nuestra Vida give Hispanics a sense of belonging, Devore said. "It provides them with that feeling of community. They do help their members a lot."

"If somebody is hurting financially, they try to help them. If somebody is hurting physically, they try to help them."

Pentecostal Hispanic churches draw immigrants eager to try a new faith. "It's a demographic trend: When you change from a community, you're very open to a change in a church situation," said Efrain Espinoza. He is the coordinator for Decade of Harvest, a Springfield, Mo., agency of the Assemblies of God denomination that concentrates on establishing churches, evangelism, prayer and recruiting new ministers.

Espinoza said that when one Hispanic becomes Pentecostal, other family members often follow. "Your family ties are very strong in the Hispanic/Latino family. My grandmother, mother and great-grandmother all became Pentecostal believers about the same time," he said.

Many Hispanic immigrants have traditionally found a sense of community in Catholic churches, and, more recently, in Baptist churches. But the Rev. Ricardo Sanchez of Holy Family Catholic Church in Clemmons doesn't worry about competition from charismatic churches. "Only God has the right answer," he said.

Members of Pentecostal Hispanic churches don't focus on drawing people from other ethnic groups to their churches. "Culturally, Hispanics like to keep their language and culture more than some of the European immigrants that came before them. That is our strength," said the Rev. Edward Martinez. He is the superintendent of the Assemblies of God's Southernmost Spanish District, which is based in Orlando and supervises 150 Hispanic churches.

Moorefield, however, said that characteristic of Hispanic churches may change as the children of immigrants grow up speaking Spanish and English. "As those children grow up and make decisions in life, I think many of them may find themselves leaving the purely Spanish services and going to the English services."

Forsyth County has a rich history of Pentecostal churches, both black and white. Two of those churches, First Assembly of God on University Parkway and St. Peter's World Outreach Center on Old Lexington Road, are on the cutting edge of racial integration, and are also among the largest churches in the county.

First Assembly has about 4,000 members. The church is predominantly white, but about 18 percent of the members are black and about 8 percent are Hispanic. The church also has a Hispanic ministry.

St. Peter's has about 3,000 members. The church is predominantly black, but about a quarter of the members are white and Hispanic.

And Greater Cleveland Avenue Christian Church on Cleveland Avenue and Lansing Drive has grown to 1,700 members, in part by going charismatic, said the Rev. Sheldon McCarter of the church. "Basically it's been the same old thing, people are tired of tradition, and tired of things being done the same way," he said.

McCarter's church does not have any Hispanic members, but plans to reach out to them. McCarter sees the Pentecostal movement as part of a sweeping revival. "God is doing a new thing across
America. It's time for people to take their ministry to the next level," he said.

But the Rev. Paige Patterson, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention and a resident of the town of Wake Forest, doubts that the charismatic movement is true revival. "There's no doubt about the success of the movement, but if it really constitutes revival, how come everything is getting worse?"

While both Southern Baptists and charismatics are earnestly calling people to God, Patterson said, violence and other ills continue.

Revival in the last days
Vazquez and other members of Iglesia Nueva Vida, however, say that the movement is changing the world - one life at a time. And it is a revival, they say.

"We all know what the Bible says: It says in the last days, there's going to be a big, big revival," said Grecia Kelly, 37. She is an immigrant from Santo Domingo.

Many of her fellow church members are lonely and hurting, pausing for a few hours from their labors to praise God in an all new way. Most are from Mexico. But others are from Spain, Guatemala, Panama, Honduras and El Salvador. They are young, middle-age and old. Some come dogged by drug problems. "Who knows who comes here? We're hoping we're bringing some sinners in," Murray said.

Tomas Gonzalez, a 27-year-old immigrant from Mexico, said that Iglesia Nueva Vida gives him something special. "You need something every time you pray. I feel good here," he said.

Worshippers gather for long sessions at the church on Sunday mornings and on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Some members participate in the church's Bible Institute, a three-year study with courses on Sunday nights.

The members help spread their denomination to new areas. It has churches in Greensboro, Lexington, Mount Airy, Spencer, Burlington, High Point and Asheboro. There are also churches in Murrells Inlet, S.C.; Orlando, Fla.; and the Mexican state of Guerrero.

Murray said, "We're also hopeful - and we know this is happening - that when people come to Christ here, they're taking it back to Mexico."

Critics accuse charismatics of being filled with emotionalism rather than the Holy Spirit. "It's appealing. I consider it like going to group therapy, like going to a stadium and shouting for a goal," Maldonado said.

"After you leave the stadium, you're subdued, you've lost it. But when you genuinely have Christ in your heart, you don't need to be emotional."

Vazquez, however, said it's the Holy Spirit that moves through his church. "This is real, when you see the changes in people, how people start to live their lives. You don't stop to drink because you have an emotion."

Miguel Pelayo, an 18-year-old immigrant from Mexico and member of Iglesia Nueva Vida, said that feeling the Holy Spirit is "something different, something beautiful."

Gonzalez said: "You feel something inside. You just start to dance, with your hands up. You do everything. You speak language, like sky language," he said, pointing to the heavens.

The story of a movement
On a recent Sunday at Iglesia Nueva Vida, several men worked in the church kitchen, readying a massive lunch of tacos for their fellow worshipers. The sweet smell of grilling white onions and the tangy smell of mounds of emerald cilantro drifted outside, mingling with the perfume of hundreds of women in their Sunday best.

Outside, a slender boy in his teens ran toward the sanctuary. He stopped to speak to a small boy. He leaned down, smiled and said, "Jesus!" He straightened up, cut loose with a hallelujah and vanished in the rolling sea of bodies in the sanctuary.

Thousands of tears and thousands of miles away from home and family melt away in this place where the words come from the heart, and all in Spanish. The words tell their story, the story of a movement that they are helping to define.

Alvarez said: "Spiritually speaking, this is the year of the Hispanics."

CAPTION: 1. FRANCISCA ANTUNEZ, FROM MEXICO, RAISES HER ARM IN WORSHIP AT THE IGLESIA NUEVA VIDA, A HISPANIC CHARISMATIC CHURCH IN WINSTON-SALEM.
2. THE REV. JOSE VAZQUEZ TALKS TO MEMBERS OF IGLESIA NUEVA VIDA CHURCH.
3. CARMEN ANTUNEZ SIGNS IN FRONT OF WORSHIPERS AT THE IGLESIA NUEVA VIDA CHURCH.
4. A MAN PUTS A DOLLAR IN THE OFFERING PLATE DURING WORSHIP SERVICE. THE CONGREGATION IS BUILDING A SANCTUARY IT HOPES TO OPEN IN THE NEW YEAR.
5. YOCZI MAGADAN (FROM LEFT), SANDRA NOYOLA AND PAHOLA NOYOLA LISTEN TO DIANA MAGADAN, A VOLUNTEER FOR THE CHURCH READ A STORY ABOUT HALLOWEEN.
6. JAVIER GOMEZ HOLDS HIS SON, ABISAI, DURING A CROWDED WORSHIP SERVICE OF IGLESIA NUEVA VIDA, OR NEW LIFE CHURCH.

KEYWORDS: HISPANIC RELIGION
CEREMONY REQUEST STIRS DEBATE
WOMEN WANT A SAME-SEX UNION AT WAIT CHAPEL

They dream of standing together beneath the high ceiling in Wait Chapel, where hundreds of couples have married in the sanctuary's 43-year history.

The couples have included alumni who worshiped as students in the chapel at Wake Forest University, as well as members of the congregation that calls the chapel home, Wake Forest Baptist Church. The two who dream of a ceremony now are members of the church.

But the two, Susan Parker and Wendy Scott of Winston-Salem, want to do what has never before been done on the Wake Forest campus: They want to be united in a same-sex covenant ceremony.

Their dream raises issues that have prompted debate on campuses nationwide - debate over how much autonomy a campus congregation really has and how to balance liberal student or faculty views on homosexuality against the often more conservative views of alumni who provide heavy financial support to the school.

After painful debates last fall, members of Wake Forest Baptist Church approved the use of their sanctuary for same-sex covenant ceremonies and gave their ministers the freedom to conduct them - although a few members have said they never intended to give their ministers that freedom.

The congregation's vote, however, did not put the issue to rest. Wake Forest Baptist is an autonomous church, but it meets in a chapel owned by and shared with the university. Many of the key players in the debate have roles in both the church and the school.

University chaplain Ed Christman - also a member of Wake Forest Baptist - will not schedule Parker and Scott's ceremony in Wait Chapel until the school sets a policy on the issue. School officials have said that the issue goes beyond the congregation, that it involves the question of whether same-sex ceremonies can occur anywhere on campus - including in the other campus chapel, Davis Chapel.

A committee of the university's board of trustees began an exploration of the issue last spring, but members say they don't know when they will finish their work.

Beyond the campus gates, the debate continues as well. "I think it is a tragic tale of the times that this is even being discussed," said the Rev. Paige Patterson, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Wake Forest Baptist formalized its break with the convention in January.

Parker and Scott have indefinitely postponed their ceremony, once tentatively set for Aug. 28.

Finding a spiritual home
Parker, 40, is a former consultant who will soon start classes at the university's new divinity school.
Scott, 44, is a former market-research manager who has multiple sclerosis and is retired on disability.

They have concealed the nature of their relationship for much of their 18 years together, dodging what they say is condemnation from those who call homosexuality a sin.

As a young adult, Parker said, she left the Southern Baptist Church, mainly because she found it unwelcoming. Scott did not have a strong church background. The two eventually discovered Wake Forest Baptist, where they said they found a community of friends with which they could be open. Parker became a church deacon.

In November 1997, Parker and Scott told the congregation that they wanted to have a covenant ceremony in Wait Chapel, their spiritual home. "One common criticism of gay and lesbian people is that we are promiscuous or incapable of forming lasting relationships. Given that we are provided little or no community support, it is amazing to us that any of us manage to sustain them," Scott told the congregation, reading from a prepared speech.

Parker added that she and Scott were asking for the right to a ceremony that would be "a public statement of our covenant to God, to each other and to our adopted family of friends."

Church members began talking about the request. Among several members who left the church over the issue was Marvin Gentry of King, a member of the university board of trustees. He said last week that he does not want same-sex ceremonies to be allowed on campus but that he did not push for the board's exploratory committee.
Christman said he acted as a university employee, not a church member, when Scott and Parker told him that they wanted a ceremony in the chapel.

"If I had thought of this more in terms of the church, and of one pair of persons, then certainly it's conceivable I would have simply scheduled it and that would have been that," he said.

Instead, he said, he wrote a note to Thomas K. Hearn Jr., the university's president, asking that the school explore the issue. Christman declined comment on how he felt about covenant ceremonies on campus, saying that to do so would be inappropriate.

Hearn, also a member of Wake Forest Baptist, turned the matter over to the board of trustees. "... the issue has been put before the university," he wrote in an Aug. 25, 1998 letter to Parker. "Since this is a question of institutional policy, it will be necessary to confer with our trustees."

Trying to balance concerns

Leon H. Corbett Jr., the secretary of the board of trustees, wrote to Richard Barnett, the chairman of the church's deacons, in February. Corbett said that the issue had been discussed at a recent board meeting.

"The hope was expressed that there would be no change until the board has an opportunity to review the matter," he wrote.

Barnett said he and Scott believed that "no change" meant to hold off on their ceremony. Barnett agreed.

Board chairman John G. Medlin Jr. of Winston-Salem appointed a four-person committee to study the issue. Medlin could not be reached for comment, and a university spokesman said that Hearn had no comment.

The committee members are chairman Mike Queen, a moderate Baptist minister from Wilmington; Lonnie Williams, a Wilmington lawyer and member of Queen's church; Weston Hatfield, a Winston-Salem lawyer and member of Wake Forest Baptist; and Jeanette Hyde, a former U.S. ambassador who lives in Raleigh.

The members declined to say what the specific concerns were behind the formation of their group, nor what, specifically, they hope to learn.

Murray C. Greason Jr. of Winston-Salem, the vice chairman of the board of trustees, said that the board must balance the concerns of students and faculty who are "by-and-large liberal" with the concerns of alumni of the historically Baptist school who are divided on the issue of homosexuality. "We have a lot of constituents, including people who sincerely believe out of religious convictions that homosexuality is sinful."

Although he doesn't personally feel that way, Greason said his duty as a trustee is to look at what is in the best interest of the university. "We don't want to be a follower in everything, but it is not our duty to Wake Forest to be a leader in causes, whether they're liberal or conservative causes. We're going to take our time and look into it and see if it teaches us anything."

Lynn Rhoades, the associate pastor of Wake Forest Baptist, worries that the university will make a decision based on money.

"My hunch is they don't want to alienate potential donors. However, the church criteria will be different. Our mandate is to follow the call of Christ, which is to extend hospitality and to be loving and welcoming."

The Rev. Richard Groves, the church's senior minister, declined comment beyond saying, "We're in discussions with the university, waiting to hear from them."

Queen said that summer-vacation schedules have delayed the committee's work. The committee has met only once, he said. Queen and Corbett have also met with Parker and church leaders at the church's request. During that meeting, Parker said, Queen and Corbett did a lot of listening as church leaders stressed church autonomy and their desire to welcome gays.

The committee's next meeting has not been scheduled, Queen said. The board's next meeting will be in October.

Opinions at other colleges

Officials at some conservative colleges would not consider allowing a same-sex ceremony to take place on their campuses. "I am very much opposed to it because I believe it a violation of Scripture," said the Rev. Richard Gray, the campus pastor at Bob Jones University in Greenville, S.C.

More moderate colleges, such as Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and Brown University in Providence, R.I., have allowed same-sex ceremonies for years.

Other schools have wrestled with the issue in the recent past.

About three years ago, Duke University decided not to allow such ceremonies in its chapel, although it does allow them elsewhere on campus. William Willimon, the dean of the chapel, said in a written statement that North Carolina does not issues licenses for same-sex unions and "virtually no Christian group considers same-sex unions the equivalent of marriage."

In 1997, officials at Emory University in Atlanta said that same-sex ceremonies could be performed in the campus chapels by campus religious leaders from faiths that allow covenant ceremonies, such as the United Church of Christ and Reform Judaism. Emory is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, but ministers with that denomination are not allowed to officiate at such ceremonies.

Also in 1997, Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., allowed the ceremonies in its chapel. In a written statement, school officials said they based their decision on the school's policy against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Studying the issue
Some members of the Wake Forest University community question the school's decision to form the study committee. "Church issues are not something that a university ought to be intruding in," said Peter Weigl, a biology professor.

Jeremy Bishop, a senior who identifies himself as Baptist and gay, said that the issue is "not really about supporting gay marriage at all; it's really about defending religious liberty."

Parker said he hopes that the committee will weigh the school's anti-discrimination statement, which says that "no person affiliated with Wake Forest should be judged or harassed on the basis of perceived or actual sexual orientation.

"In affirming its commitment to this principle, Wake Forest does not limit freedom of religious association or expression..."

Queen said that the committee will take the statement into account.

Should the board rule that members of Wake Forest Baptist cannot use Wait Chapel for covenant ceremonies, some wonder whether the congregation would leave the chapel. "I think that's a very important question, and the answer is, 'I don't know,'" Christman said.

Asking for support

Parker and Scott continue to answer questions about their dream. No, they say, they're not just trying to make a point. It's crucial that their ceremony take place in their own church; they haven't considered going elsewhere.

Neither of them will wear a tuxedo, neither will be identified as "the wife" or "the husband," and they won't have a cake with a plastic bride and groom on top.

"And neither Groves nor Rhoades will officiate at the ceremony," Parker and Scott said. Instead, they said, their ministers will participate in the ceremony like everyone else, by lending support to their union.

They plan to say vows to each other, they said, and have audience members talk about how they will support the union.

They're not trying to equate their covenant to marriage, Parker said. In some ways, she said, she hopes their covenant will mean more than a marriage.

"This is about spiritual relationships: to each other, to our families and to God. We trust the university will do the right thing."

The problem, say those involved in the issue, is finding agreement on what "the right thing" is.

CAPTION: 1. ED CHRISTMAN: He is waiting for the college to set a policy on the issue.
2. SUSAN PARKER (LEFT) AND WENDY SCOTT WANT TO HAVE A SAME-SEX COVENANT CEREMONY AT WAIT CHAPEL ON THE CAMPUS OF WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY. A COMMITTEE OF THE UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES IS STUDYING THE ISSUE.

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