

Faith & Values Finding meaning in spirit, family and community

SNAPSHOT / METRO ATLANTA PLACES OF WORSHIP

'The community needs us'



The Rev. J. Sherman Pelt speaks during the 7:30 a.m. service on a recent Sunday at Liberty Baptist Church in Atlanta. Photos by TODD R. McQUEEN / Special

LIBERTY BAPTIST CHURCH
— ATLANTA

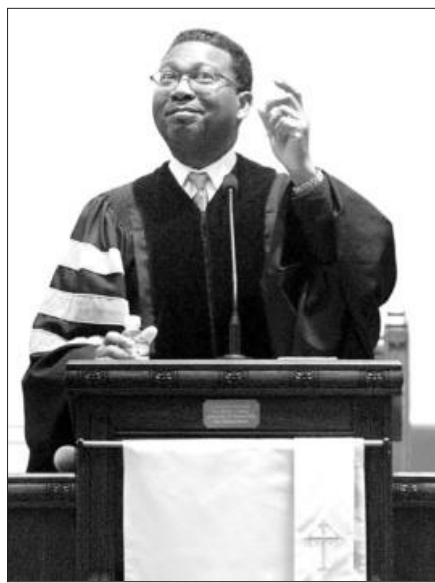
395 Chamberlain St. S.E., Atlanta
 ► **Services and worship style:** 7:30 a.m. traditional, 10:30 a.m. contemporary
 ► **Average Sunday attendance:** 200
 ► **Minister:** the Rev. J. Sherman Pelt
 ► **Denomination affiliation:** Progressive National Baptist Convention
 ► **Mission statement:** "To lovingly embody the message of the Messiah in the faith community as we reach out to the world."
 ► **Phone:** 404-525-3588
 ► **Web site:** www.lbc-atl.org

History

Liberty was organized as a Missionary Baptist Church in May 1908. Under the leadership of various pastors over the years, church members made strides as they established the church newspaper, the Liberty Echo, the church magazine, the Liberty Messenger, and introduced the use of individual Communion glasses to replace the single cup. In 1958, Melvin Watson, who served as chairman of Morehouse College's Department of Religion, was called as pastor. During his term, additional land was purchased for parking and recreation space, and the church voted to affiliate with the Progressive National Convention and the New Era Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. Pelt, who joined the staff in 1991, has overseen the building of a new church structure on the original site.

Pastor's path

The Alabama native accepted the call to preach in May 1973, was licensed the following August and ordained by a Baptist church in Clinton, Ala., in 1975. Pelt earned an associate's degree from Selma University in Selma, Ala.,



For Pelt, the focus is on reaching out to and serving people, not growth.

a bachelor's in secondary education from Livingston University, a master's of divinity in church history from the Interdenominational Theological Center/Morehouse School of Religion and a doctor of ministry degree in Christian education from Candler School of Theology at Emory.

Ministries

Serving the community is the most important mission for Liberty church members, according to Pelt. "At one point, we were looking at where we could go and have the most numerical growth, but we consciously decided to not allow that to be our thrust in doing ministry," said the pastor. "We try to keep our focus on serving the community in which we are situated. We feel strongly that the community needs us and our flavor of ministry."

A tutorial program is open for two hours each Saturday for children in



A woman at a Liberty Baptist Church service bows her head during prayer.

grades 1-12. A breakfast for the homeless is offered on the first and third Saturdays of each month. Members also participate in Meals on Wheels, delivering food to local residents in need. A strong ministry for children and youths includes an active basketball program.

Thoughts from the pastor

"The most important thing is to be a church for the community. We made a conscious effort to try to be our best in doing that. Not to focus primarily on numerical growth, but to reach the people and to serve the people," said Pelt. "Our motto is like a friendly church with a community focus. We pride ourselves in being friendly — not a tiny church but not so large so people can get to know each other."

— Candice Hannigan, for the Journal-Constitution

If you'd like your house of worship spotlighted, contact candihan@bellsouth.net.

Budget can't afford union

Q: The board of our 273-unit co-op wants to replace our union cleaning service with a nonunion service to save \$35,000 a year, although the board acknowledges that our present service performs admirably. Facing rising costs, the board stresses its duty to stay within its budget and hold down monthly fees. Is the board acting ethically? What can residents do if they disagree with it?

JOAN GREENFIELD
Boston

A: The board first should negotiate with the current service, seeking to preserve good union jobs without busting your building's budget. Dissenting tenants should express their willingness to pay a bit more rather than squeeze the cleaning crew. It would cost each unit only \$10.68 a month to make up that \$35,000. While the board has financial obligations to the co-op owners, it also should treat its employees fairly.

Update: The board replaced its unionized service with nonunion workers. The union company found jobs in other buildings for the original crew, but not full-time work.

Q: I am a member of a non-profit benevolent organiza-



RANDY COHEN
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EVERYDAY ETHICS

tion. I am considering proposing that we give the homeless cardboard boxes — big enough for a person to sleep in, heavily waxed and hence weatherproof. For the cost of helping 100 people with our traditional programs, we could help 1,000 with these boxes. Is this an ethical project?

TOM HOPKINS
Vail, Colo.

A: Your proposal is disturbing in that it vividly evokes, abets and thus, in a sense, endorses homeless people sleeping in cardboard boxes. But your project is not unethical. Indeed, to the extent that it would relieve human misery, it is estimable. Your organization might more effectively devote its money and time not just to mitigating present hardship but also to addressing its causes.

Update: Hopkins' idea didn't get anywhere. "There was not a lot of excitement" about it, he said.

Readers can direct their questions and comments by e-mail to ethicist@nytimes.com.

Cantor: Songs unlock emotions

► Continued from D1

mother was singing in USO shows to entertain soldiers. Her mother and her aunt had sung a rendition of the Andrews Sisters' hit record, "Bei Mir Bist du Schoen," a Yiddish song.

Shaw asked Marcus if she knew it.

"So Donna Faye started singing the song. And one would think that my mom would just lay there, as she had no strength. And then she started singing along with Donna Faye. The complete song! It was one of those moments when you say, 'Oh, my gosh.' The whole room just lit up.

"I was the only witness to this thing. So it was really special to me."

Marcus said she believes her gift of song opens doors for her that are often closed to those outside the circle of family. She gets to see, share

with and help people at life's most important moments.

"You get people at these intense moments in their lives when there is no pretense," she said.

"It makes me realize how precious every moment is."

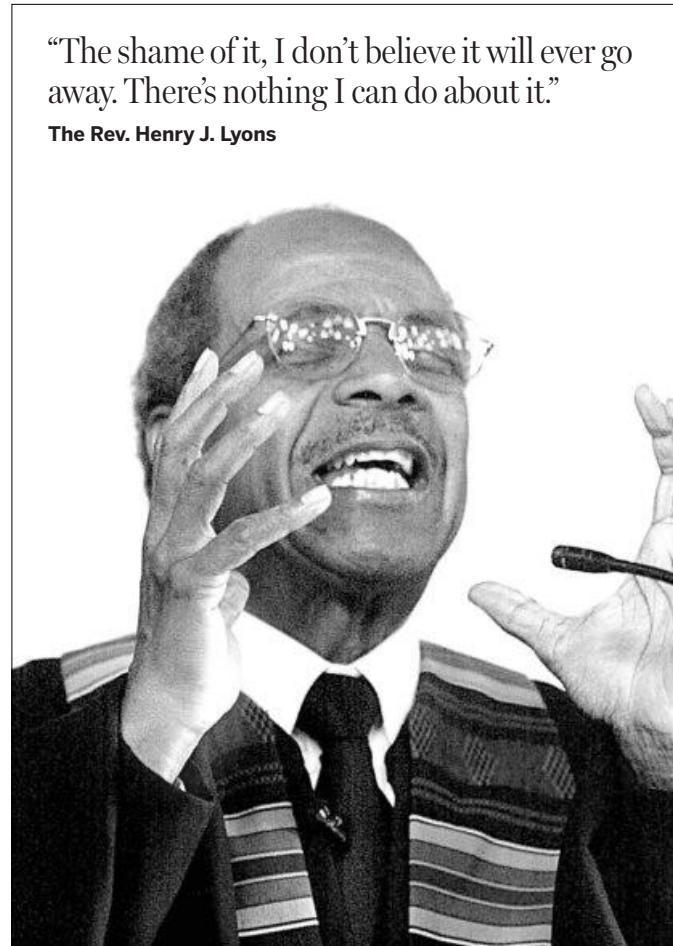
To prepare for that responsibility, she spent a year in Jerusalem, three years in New York in chaplaincy training and four years in graduate school for cantors.

Her work may be a gift for others, but she also receives much from it. At the end of a day, driving home and getting stuck in the inevitable Atlanta traffic does not seem so bad.

"When you've just spent time with someone fighting for their last breath, you realize what is really important," she said.

To hear Donna Faye Marcus sing, go to cantormarcus.com.

Preacher wants to head group he bilked



The Rev. Henry J. Lyons was sent to prison for stealing about \$4 million from the National Baptist Convention USA. Associated Press / 2003 photo

"The shame of it, I don't believe it will ever go away. There's nothing I can do about it."

The Rev. Henry J. Lyons

Lyons runs for Baptist convention presidency

By ROSE FRENCH
Associated Press

Nashville — The ousted former president of a national organization of black Baptist churches is running for the position again, a decade after he was sent to prison for stealing millions of dollars from the group.

The Rev. Henry J. Lyons was forced out as leader of the National Baptist Convention USA in 1999 after an investigation revealed he abused his power in the convention to steal about \$4 million. He used the money to buy luxury homes and jewelry, and to support his mistresses.

Lyons currently serves as pastor of New Salem Missionary Baptist Church in Tampa and lost a bid to become president of the convention's Florida chapter in 2007.

Lyons is running against one other candidate, the Rev. Julius R. Scruggs, pastor of First Missionary Baptist

Church, in Huntsville, Ala., who also serves as vice president at large of the convention. The election takes place in September.

Aldon Morris, a professor of sociology at Northwestern University who's written extensively about the convention, says Lyons faces an uphill battle and he doesn't expect him to win.

"I think there's significant numbers of leaders in the group across the county who feel it's fine to forgive, but why have a leader with this sort of baggage?" Morris said. "The organization was very embarrassed by the charges against him. He certainly left it in bad shape."

But Lyons isn't without supporters. The Rev. Darin Freeman, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church in Charleston, W.Va., praised Lyons for reducing the convention's debt by two-thirds in four years and skillfully handling divisions between churches of different sizes.

"Smaller churches around the country felt like they were equal with megachurches," Freeman said. "A

local pastor of 300 is equal to a pastor of 30 or a pastor of 3,000. All of us have a say."

Lyons didn't respond to several attempts by The Associated Press to reach him by phone. But he told The Tennessean newspaper in Nashville that while he damaged the convention's reputation, he's a changed man who deserves a second chance as president.

"The shame of it, I don't believe it will ever go away. There's nothing I can do about it," he said.

The current president, the Rev. William J. Shaw, can't seek a third five-year term under convention rules.

Lyons' downfall came after his wife, Deborah, set fire to a \$700,000 waterfront home he co-owned with a mistress, and the resulting investigation revealed he'd stolen money from the organization. The Lyonses have since divorced.

Lyons was convicted of racketeering and grand theft in 1999. He resigned as president of the National Baptist Convention and pleaded guilty to federal charges of tax evasion, fraud and making false statements.

Book: Began with blog

► Continued from D1

I came to is the idea we should have awe for breakfast preparation or doing the laundry, imbuing everyday activities with a sense of reverence. Those things that we call mundane are actually the soul of who we are.

Q: Do people in your own life expect you now to be in a Zen-like state of calm?

A: If you talked to my immediate family they would laugh and laugh at that question. At first I got kind of weirded out that I was going to show up at readings and disappoint people, because I don't speak like I write in the book. I show up as just this middle-aged woman. But there's a lot of response to the normality. Here's this person struggling with raising children, clutter. So if its possible for her to achieve this kind of understanding, then I can too.