

# Atlanta rappers take crunk to the pulpit

ATLANTA (AP) — Heavy bass beats echo through the church as youngsters rush down the sanctuary aisles. Colorful stage lights spin around overhead as the eager fans start screaming, "JESUS, JESUS, JESUS!"

When the sextet Dem Unknown WarriorZ appears up front, the music and the fans go quiet. Group leader Bennie "Preacha" Foster asks the crowd of about 2,000 to first "give God the praise." Then the beat returns even louder than before.

This high-energy act that could stand as the headliner at any nightclub is instead performing its own religion-infused version of "crunk" hip hop at various churches in the Atlanta area.

"We're fishing," Foster said after the performance at Divine Faith Ministries in suburban Jonesboro. "The bait youngsters are eating is hip hop. So we take that music, dice it up, we put some Jesus flavor to it and save souls in Jesus' name. That's how we do it."

To its fans, crunk music, with its electronic drums and synthesized brass instruments, generates excitement akin to a religious experience. But the genre — most often associated with R-rated chants by hip-hop artists — is seldom heard in churches.

Crunk became popular through Southern-based producer Lil Jon, who is known for his energetic trademark shouts and hit singles, "Get Low" and "Snap Yo Fingers."

"I respect Lil Jon as a producer," Foster said. "But we switch up the message with the thumping beat they recognize. We present ourselves in a hip-hop manner, so youths can have something they can relate to."

Dem Unknown WarriorZ first came together in 2001 through Foster's NowFaith International Ministries. They came up with the group name when a fan called them Christ's warriors, who aren't concerned about receiving recognition for their good deeds.

Their unorthodox approach isn't always a hit.

With distinctive baggy clothing, long shiny chains and Foster's mouth full of gold teeth, the group members are often mistaken for thugs.

After group member Greg Taylor posted a performance of their song "Walls Down" on the Internet video sharing site YouTube in June, their single received over 23,500 hits — and mostly negative reviews.

Some viewers said they couldn't bear to watch the entire video after a scene where one person hops off the pulpit, while the entire crowd dances frantically.

"I doubt very seriously that these misguided children are jumping up and down from the joy of the Lord," one posting read. "I highly suspect it's the BEAT that's got them riled up."

Despite their attention-grabbing style, Foster believes their purpose should be the focus.

"We represent harder than any other person who talks about drugs, sex and money," he said. "We are born-again, sanctified, delivered in Jesus' name. Some people have a

problem with the way we represent. It's time for some ... Christians to stand up and represent in the industry and the media."

The Rev. Rodney Turner, a Baptist minister in Atlanta who has a traditional outlook, believes bringing crunk into church isn't right. A pastor for 17 years, he said youngsters can be saved without using worldly tactics.

"Does God need new gimmicks to uplift us? No," Turner said. "Romans 12:2 says: 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.' Really, are young people turning from things such as their bad habits and fornication after the show? That's what it all comes down to."

Group member Tracy Brown said his six children have been able to relate better to church because of gospel crunk, and it has given them a positive outlook.

"For me to hear my kids sing the songs and understand, it helps me," said Brown. "Rather than talking about shooting someone or drugs, I know for my children I want to hear them say something positive."

The group performs its gospel crunk at least twice a week at worship services and Bible studies.

On their own time, the group members' paths diverge. Taylor, 24, studies religion at Georgia State University. Dice Gamble, 31, focuses on her solo gospel rap career. Tracy Brown, 33, and 45-year-old Anthony Brown are ordained pastors, and Talon Stuart, 32, is an entrepreneur.

On Sundays at noon, Foster holds youth meetings at space he rents in Club Chocolate, a place known more for its nightlife than godly worship. But as with gospel crunk, he hopes people understand his intentions.

"We take the church outside, and we are out of the box," Foster said. "It doesn't matter where we are praising."

Yvette Stubber, 46, who attended the event at Divine Faith Ministries, said she's been a member of the church since 1995. She's noticed young Christians have been willing to attend church through gospel crunk.

"We're in a new generation," Stubber said. "We're trying to bring to the kids that we recognize them, and get them into church. What better way to do this for them?"

The Messengers, a 17-member young adult choir that sings and raps, opened recently for Dem Unknown WarriorZ. Group member Bryce Truitt, 17, said they seek to lead by example.

"We are trying to get our teenagers to see what our young adults are doing," he said. "They can come and talk to people like us, instead of their friends who are in the streets."

Diamond Gatlin, 17, brought her 6-year-old sister, Faith Jones, to the show. Gatlin said she would attend church more often if she could hear more gospel crunk, because she can relate to it.

"When they use Christian hip-hop, it makes me want to listen to that music more," Gatlin said. "I like the feel and beat. I can get the message a whole lot better because it has an urban feel to it."

## Grade school generosity

Colby Grade School fifth graders, Haileigh Shull, left, Brevyn Fleming and Billy Selley carried food Dec. 19 collected by students at the school during their annual holiday food drive. The food was donated to Genesis of Thomas County.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

# SHARE the FAITH

Worship in the church of your choice this weekend.



REDEEMING LOVE MINISTRIES, INC., 345 N. Franklin, Dr. W.G. and Rev. Orvella Romine, Saturday Evening 7p.m. Worship, Equipping Class, Sunday, 10a.m., Sunday worship, 11a.m., Wednesday, R.L.M Training Centers (Bible School), 7p.m.

## Schedule of church services

**ASCENSION-ON-THE-PRAIRIE EPISCOPAL**, Rev. Don Martin, College Drive & Wheatridge Rd., 462-3041, Holy Eucharist, 9:00 a.m. every Sunday. Evening Prayer, 5:15 p.m. Wednesday, September through May. Christian Education for Youth, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, September through May

**COLLEGE DRIVE ASSEMBLY OF GOD**, Pastor, Jeremy Gundling, 245 W. College Dr. - 462-8234, Early Service - 8:00 a.m.; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Morning Worship - 10:45 a.m.

**BEREAN CHURCH**, 1000 S. Franklin, 460-2763, www.colbyberan.com; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:45 a.m. Awana Clubs, Wednesday, 7 p.m., Middle & High School, Wednesday, 7 p.m. @ the Heartland Christian School Gym

**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**, Rev. Carroll H. Morony, Grant & Webster Street, 462-2867. Sunday School 9:15 a.m., Morning Worship 10:30 a.m.

**COLLEGE VIEW BAPTIST CHURCH**, (SBC), Pastor Tom Huffman, 1185 Wheatridge Rd. at College Drive, 460-7144, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship services, 10:45 a.m.

**MINGO BIBLE CHURCH**, 420 Main Mingo, 785-462-2992: An independent community church served by Village Missions Pastor Chris Shubert. Sunday School: 9:30AM - all ages. Sunday Services: 10:45AM. Sunday Nights: 1st Sunday of the month: potluck following morning service - no evening service; 2nd Sunday: services at 6:30 PM; 3rd Sunday: informal fellowship - bring a snack to share!; 4th and 5th Sunday: services at 6:30 p.m.

**SACRED HEART CATHOLIC**, 462-2179, Father Dana Clark, Pastor, Saturday Eve. Mass 5:30 p.m., Sunday Masses 8:00 & 10:00 a.m., Confessions will be heard Saturday 4:30-5:05 p.m. and from 7:30-7:45 a.m. and 9:25-9:40 a.m. on Sunday.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**, Rev. Carol Rahn, 515 W. 4th, 462-6342, Worship, 9:00 a.m.

**WESLEYAN CHURCH**, 320 W. Pine - 462-8391, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:40 a.m., Sunday Evening Cell groups at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday Youth Ministries, Kids Clubhouse 7 p.m.

**CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**, 1145 S. Franklin - 460-6605, President Gary Slavens, 460-2656; Rocky Robbins, 1st counselor, 460-1101; Tim Wilson, 2nd counselor, 785-846-7796. Sacrament meeting 10 a.m., Sunday School and Primary 11:20 a.m., Priesthood, Relief Society, YM/YW, 12:10 p.m.; Family History Center open to public, 7-9 p.m. Thursdays or by appointment. Call 462-3571.

**COLBY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**, Rev. James Mardock, pastor, 950 S. Franklin, 462-6521, Sunday Worship Services at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m., 6:30 p.m., Fellowship coffee 9:30 a.m., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., KXXX broadcasts 11:00 worship. http://www.gbmg-umc.org/colby-umc/

**REDEEMING LOVE MINISTRIES, INC.**, 345 N. Franklin, Dr. W.G. and Rev. Orvella Romine, Saturday Evening 7p.m. Worship, Equipping Class, Sunday, 10a.m., Sunday worship, 11a.m., Wednesday, R.L.M Training Centers (Bible School), 7p.m.

**CHURCH OF CHRIST**, 510 E. 4th, Jay Kelley, minister, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday Eve. Worship 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

**COLBY EVANGELISM CENTER**, Rev. Robert Cooper, 815 West 3rd - 462-2062, Sunday School 9:45; Sunday service 10:00 and 6:30 p.m.; Wednesday Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Friday Youth Power Hour at 7:00 p.m.

**FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH**, (Disciples of Christ), Pastor Bradley L. Herndon, 385 W. 3rd - 460-2718, Sunday Morning Worship at 9:00 a.m.; Sunday School at 10:30 a.m. E-mail: fccolby@st-tel.net

**TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Rev. John L. Schmidt, East 5th & Country Club, 462-3497, Services, Sat., 5:30 p.m., Sunday; Sunday School and Adult Bible Class 9:15 a.m.; Services, 10:30 a.m. Visit us at www.trinitycolby.com

**OUR SAVIORS LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Brewster, Sunday worship 9:00 a.m.; 2nd Sunday of the month at 8:00 a.m.

**PLEASANT HOME CHURCH**, Pastor, Charlie Busch, 694-2242, 3190 Road 70, Edson, Worship, 9:00 a.m., Sunday School 10:00 a.m., Evening service, 6:00 p.m.

**LEVANT COMMUNITY CHURCH**, 205 1st St., Pastor Jerry Vincent, 586-2376, Sunday School (classes for 3 years & up and 3 adult classes) 9:30 a.m., Morning worship 10:30 a.m.

**WINONA METHODIST CHURCH**, Rev. Sheryl Johnson, Sunday School, 10:30 a.m., Morning Worship 9:15 a.m. (CDT)

**BREWSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**, PO Box 250, Brewster. Pastor Dorine Chambers, 785-462-6044, Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.; Worship Service, 10:45 a.m.

**THE SHEPHERD'S STAFF, REXFORD**, Joan Dingwerth, Director, 687-2565

**REXFORD COMMUNITY CHURCH**, Rexford, Pastor Lane Purcell, 687-3305, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

**BREWSTER COMMUNITY CHURCH**, Mike Pinkelman, Pastor, Brewster - 694-2720, Sunday School (all ages) 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m., Bible Study 7:00 p.m., Wed. mornings 6:30 a.m. - Men's Bible Study, Wed. 7:00 p.m. - Children's Ministries (Royal Rangers/Missionettes), Wed. 7:15 p.m. - Intercessory & Prayer, Thurs. 4:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study

# Episcopal conservatives invited to Anglican meeting

LONDON (AP) — Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams may invite representatives of the conservative wing of The U.S. Episcopal Church to meet with Anglican leaders ahead of a key February gathering on the future of their embattled global fellowship.

In a Dec. 18 letter to heads of the 38 Anglican provinces, Williams said deep divisions in the American church warrant the move. The text of the letter was posted on the blog titusonenine, run by Canon Kendall Harmon of the Diocese of South Carolina, and on the blog of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.

The Episcopal Church is the U.S. wing of the 77 million-member global Anglican Communion, a loose-knit group of churches that trace their roots to the Church of England.

Most overseas Anglicans are conservatives who are pressuring the American denomination to adhere to traditional Christian teaching on sexuality and other issues.

But many Episcopalians counter that conservatives are demanding a conformity of belief that was never before required of Anglicans.

In 2003, the U.S. denomination ordained the first openly gay bishop, V. Gene Robinson of New

Hampshire, prompting conservative Episcopalians, a minority in the 2.2 million-member denomination, to distance themselves from national church leaders.

Some have left the denomination and affiliated with like-minded traditionalists in overseas Anglican churches. The most dramatic departure came on Dec. 17, when two of the largest and most prominent Episcopal churches in the Diocese of Virginia, and seven smaller parishes in the diocese, broke with the denomination and joined a rival U.S. church network overseen by Anglican Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria, an outspoken conservative.

As the Anglicans' spiritual leader, Williams is struggling to keep the communion unified. The 38 Anglican provincial leaders, called primates, will discuss whether they can resolve their differences during the February meeting in Tanzania.

Williams affirmed in the letter that he will invite newly installed Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori to the gathering. Jefferts Schori, who was invested as head of the American church last month, supports ordaining partnered gays and blessing same-sex couples.

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