

Saints and sinners: Store front churches are big sell

I don't know whether Bill Clinton will be going to his office in Harlem on Sundays or not. If he does, I hope he goes to church first.

In churches with black congregations, you can hear some of the best preaching - and singing - anywhere. I'll tell you one of the reasons for the good preaching: The black congregations are responsive.

While the minister is preaching, the people in the pews break in with their own comments, such as "Amen!" and "Yes! Yes!" I once asked a black pastor if these interruptions were distracting.

"Distracting?" he said. "I couldn't preach without them."

Compare this audience participation with the blank looks on the faces of the people in most white congregations. This lack of enthusiasm

from the pews kills many a preacher's fervor. When I was a parish minister, I would often take my glasses off when I preached. Because I am badly near-sighted, the congregation appeared to be a big blur, and I imagined that everyone had eager, expectant looks on their faces. People couldn't explain it, but they always said I preached better with my glasses off.

Bill Clinton will be able to have his pick of all the churches in Harlem - from the big, imposing structures to the storefront churches. I remember one congregation that met in a vacant drugstore. Instead of stained-glass windows, worshippers looked up at empty shelves that once held things like aspirin, cough syrup and cans of shaving cream.

The exterior wasn't much, either. It looked every bit like a vacant drugstore. There was a



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small sign outside, but some of the letters had fallen off. "CHURCH GO IN CHRIST," the hand-lettered sign said.

The sign had a telephone number to call for information on healing services and prayers for the sick, but people would have had trouble reaching the number because one of the digits was missing.

Storefront churches have long been a famil-

iar sight on the dingy, down-at-the-heels urban landscape. The invitation in the window promises salvation and a better life to all who enter. Who cares if some of the letters in the sign are missing? You will be made to feel more welcome in the storefront church than anywhere else in the world.

There were only a few of us at the church I attended, but we sang and clapped our hands and listened to each other talk about what Jesus has meant to us. Even I got up to make a testimonial. "Praise the Lord!" they all said when I sat down.

A little girl got up and sang "God Never Fails" without any accompaniment. Then came the prayers. These people found reason to give thanks for things the rest of us complain about. One woman who was born in the South thanked

the Lord for bringing her to "this nice city where we can ride the buses." A man gave thanks that "God woke me up this morning."

The pastor was Elder Samuel, a big, good-natured man who was "saved" 20 years ago and has been preaching ever since. He is a parking lot attendant during the week.

He never prepares his sermons in advance. "I get a revelation from God when I preach," he said. On this particular Sunday he preached about personal righteousness.

I could have stayed for the whole Sunday morning service, but it was 12:45 and I had to go. I had been there since 10:30. I got up and made another short testimonial and said I would be back. "Praise the Lord!" they all said again.

Bill Clinton is in for a treat. If he calls me, I'll join him.

Church making Internet central to 21st century religious experience

By Matt Slagle

Associated Press Writer
GRAPEVINE, Texas — Bandwidth. Streaming media. Web portals.

Terms once exclusive to money-hungry Internet startups now are entering a nonprofit region of cyberspace: dot-com churches.

Many are offering more than just an e-mail address, including Fellowship Church in Grapevine.

The 12,000-member church recently overhauled its Web site to take a Net-centric approach to spreading the Gospel, Senior Pastor Ed Young says.

"This is a great tool to bring them to our message in a nonthreatening environment," Young says. "If Jesus were in the flesh today I think he would say, 'Go online.'"

Church leaders envision fellowshipchurch.com as a Web portal — a

one-stop shop for stock quotes, news and sports updates, and Scripture.

The site includes a virtual bookstore where patrons can purchase Bibles, videotapes and DVDs, and music in CD and MP3 formats. There's a library of digitized sermons delivered by Young that can be viewed for free from a home computer, as well as a scheduling system where congregants can register for Bible classes and intramural sports.

To market fellowshipchurch.com, two building-sized, backlit metal signs were erected on the side of the church and adjacent administration office. The signs are in view of a nearby highway traveled by thousands of motorists daily.

Preston Mitchell, pastor of spiritual development and church spokesman, calls such high-profile advertising "Marketing 101."

"We think of dot-com as dot-community. Really, what the Internet does for us is it gives people the opportunity to check out the church in a safe environment. They don't have to show up," he says.

Marina del Rey, Calif.-based Internet religion expert Mark Kellner says churches are taking a cue from businesses and aggressively defining their Net presence.

"Many churches are making the Internet part of their public image, including their Web site addresses as part of church signs, billboards and print ads, as well as television and radio programs. I do not know of any church that has gone as far as these folks. Then again, someone has to be first," he said via e-mail.

"I do think the labeling of the building with a 'dot-com' sign is rather sharp

right now. How it will appear five or 10 years down the road is another matter. But I certainly — and enthusiastically — applaud their initiative," Kellner says. "They are doing just about everything right in terms of branding."

Rabbi Robert B. Lennick, president and chief executive officer of Religion in American Life, says the development of Internet-savvy houses of worship was inevitable.

"It's a recognition that people are really searching for ways to be connected without having to be in proximity of each other," he says.

Lennick's Stamford, Conn.-based group was founded by President Truman in 1949 to promote diversity in American religion.

Other churches have pushed even deeper into the virtual world.

Mark Mann, pastor and founder of

Edmond, Okla.-based CyberChurch.com, has delivered the Gospel entirely via the Web since 1995.

"You just have more of an open-ended environment where decisions can be made and progress can be made without the need to be physically there," Mann says.

About 75 people subscribe to his church, and another 30 take classes on his Web site, he says.

Glenda Van Slyke of Rockwood, Tenn., says she enjoys the candor she finds among fellow CyberChurch members.

"I find people on the Net are more open because they are not afraid to express their beliefs, and you can have a discussion and not worry about repercussions," Van Slyke says. "So many are searching for something more and I think the Net is helping to fill the void

that the church is not."

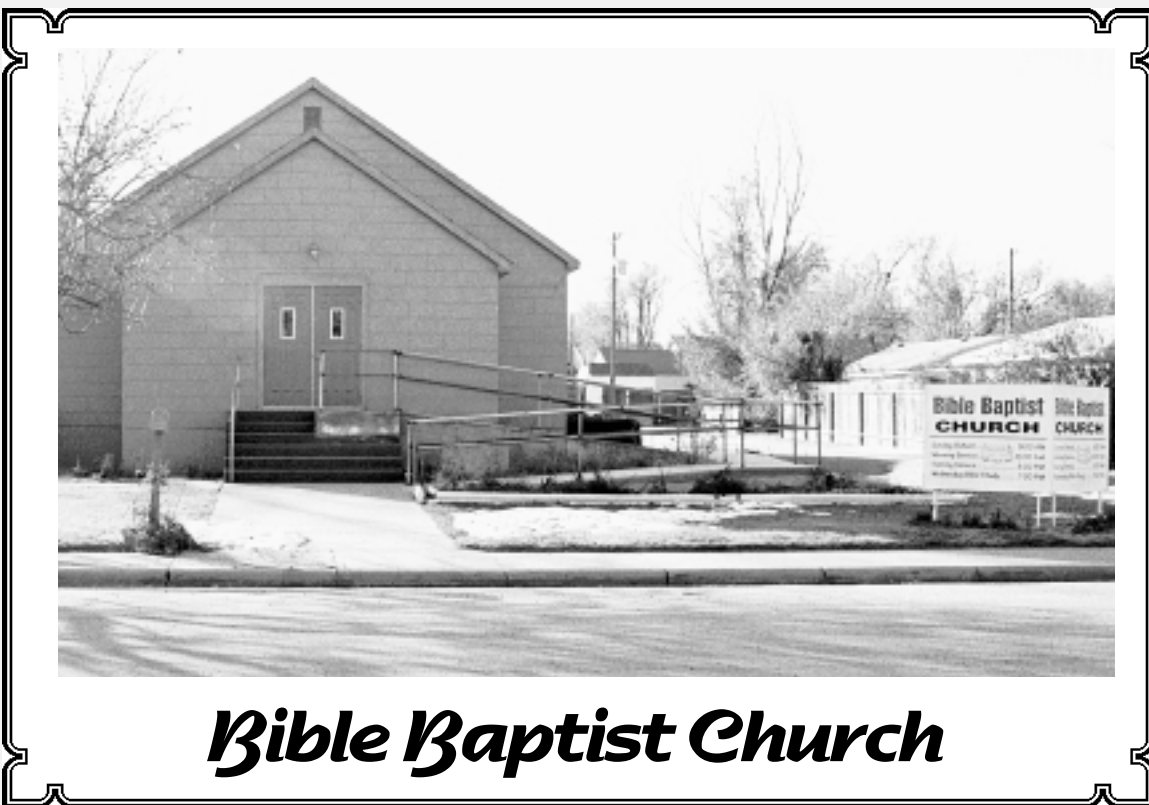
Lennick says religion on the Web complements other forms of worship nicely, but does not replace the real thing.

"We're taking the notion of a sacred space and turning it into cyberspace," he says. "What makes a place sacred is not the four walls or the other trappings, it's the kind of relationships that go on inside those spaces."

On the Net:

Fellowship Church: <http://fellowshipchurch.com>; Religion in American Life: <http://www.rial.org>; CyberChurch: <http://www.cyberchurch.org>

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Bible Baptist Church

Bible Baptist Church
Pastor: Don Crutcher
Fifth & Broadway
899-7368
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Worship Service: 10 am
Evening Service: 6:30 pm
Wednesday: Evening Bible Study: 7 pm

Calvary Gospel Church
Pastor: Rev. Steve Rains
Fourth & College • 899-3605
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Morning Worship: 10:30 am
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm
Wednesday: Family Night: 7 pm
Adult Bible Study and Youth Group
Saturday: Prayer Meeting: 5-7 pm
If you would like to receive a free newsletter, please call the church office.

Church of Christ
401 Caldwell
899-6185
Sunday: Bible Study: 9:45 am
Worship Service: 10:45 am
Evening Service: 6 pm
Wednesday: Bible Study: 7 pm

Church of the Nazarene
Pastor: Matthew Delp
Third & Caldwell
899-2080 or 899-3797
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:45 am
Worship Service: 10:50 am
Evening Service: 6 pm
Wednesday: Evening Service: 7 pm

First Baptist Church
Pastor:
Fifth & Center • 899-3450
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Morning Worship: 10:30 am
Evening Worship: 6 pm
Tuesday: Mens' Prayer Group: 5:30 am
Thursday: Ladies' Bible Study: 10 am

Seventh Day Adventist Church
Pastor: Bobby Potter • 332-3956
Saturday: Sabbath School: 9:30 am
Worship Service: 11 am

First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Pastor: Loren Strait
Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Worship Service: 10:30 am
Activities: Junior High & High School Youth Groups, Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups, Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship
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First United Methodist Church
1116 Sherman
899-3631
Pastor: Rev. Carol Moore-Ramey
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:15 am
Worship Service: 10:30 am

Sonrise Christian Church
Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398
Minister: Tony Kaika
Youth Minister: Doug Bean
Sunday: Worship Service: 9:30 am
Sunday School: 10:45 am
Wednesday:
Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm
Adult & Children's Classes: 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran Church
13th & Sherman • 899-6161
Pastor: Scott Grimshaw
Sunday: Sunday School: 8:45 am
Worship Service: 10 am
Wednesday: Confirmation: 6 pm

Kanorado United Methodist Church
Pastor: Leonard Cox
399-2468
Sunday: Sunday School: 9 am
Worship Service: 10:15 am

Goodland Bible Church
109 Willow Road • 899-6400
Pastor:
Sunday: Sunday School: 9:45 am
Morning Worship: 11 am
Evening Worship: 6 pm
Wednesday: Call for location

Grace Fellowship Church
104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423
Pastor: Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134
Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am
Worship Service: 11 am

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
13th & Center
899-2115 or Rectory 899-2114
Priest: Father Charles Schneider
Deacon: Gretchen Talitha
Saturday: Church School: 4 pm
Holy Communion: 5 pm
Wednesday: Bible Study: 7 pm
Sr. Warden for emergencies during the week 899-2067

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (970) 664-2470
Sacrament Meeting: 9:30 am
Sunday School: 10:45 am
Priesthood/Relief Society: 11:30 am

Word of Life Foursquare Church
223 E. 10th
899-5250
Pastor: John Coumerilh
Sunday: Worship Celebration & Kids' Church: 10:30 am

United Methodist Church Brewster:
Pastor:
Worship Service: 10:45 am CST
Sunday School: 9:45 am CST
Winona:
Minister: Rev. Bob Winters
Worship Service: 9 am CST
Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

Iglesia Del Dios Vivo
La Luz Del Mundo
Spanish Speaking Church
Minister: Esteban Ortiz B.
1601 Texas • 899-5275
Daily Prayer: Sunday thru Saturday: 5 am & 6 pm
Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am

Our Lady of Perpetual Help
Pastor: Father Daryl Olmstead
307 W. 13th • 899-7205
Sacrament of Reconciliation: 4:30-5 pm Saturday or by appointment
Mass Schedule:
Saturday: 6 pm
Sunday: 8 am and 10:30 am
Spanish Mass: 1st & 3rd Sunday: 2 pm

Pleasant Home Church
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Rt. 1, Box 180 • 694-2807 • 3190 Road 70
Pastor: Jim Cress
899-5784
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Sunday School: 10 am
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