Massey Hill Pastor Seeks To Aid Neighborhood Youth

By JIM PHARR
Staff Writer

A young man who grew up in the Massey Hill community has returned as assistant pastor of the Massey Hill Baptist Church and is leading young people in the area in spiritual and physical growth.

He is Tommy Underwood, 20, son of Tommy and Shelby Underwood, 2252 Sandhill Drive, and a rising sophomore at Campbell College at Buies Creek.

Tommy's father was active for a number of years in Cumberland County A.B.C. law enforcement activities.

In directing the youth program at the church's gymnasium, Underwood works on Mondays through Fridays with young people, including older youth on Wednesdays. The gym also is open on an informal basis on Saturday nights and future coffee houses are planned.

Underwood's principal work is with youngsters ages 5 through 12, averaging about 25 per day in the facility.

Activities include Bible study, basketball, volleyball, "kickball," arts and crafts and refreshments.

Underwood said the principal purpose of his work "is development of the kids mentally and spiritually and helping to keep them out of trouble and influencing quite a few to the good."

The assistant pastor finds the younger children are easier to work with than the older youth.

"They will listen to you more," Underwood said.

The youth director said, "I grew up with kids from this area and I was like the average 'boobhead.' This gymnasium brought me into the church five years ago and got me interested."

Underwood said he had a "born-again" experience two years ago and decided to preach about a year and a-half ago "and I never have regretted it."

Praising the church's minister, the Rev. C.J. Calvert, for his leadership with community young people, Underwood said, "If it can happen to me, I know it can be done again."

The assistant pastor said he finds today's young people "more vulnerable" to the influence of drugs than his generation was.

"They find it easy to go into drugs or to try alcohol since they are catered to these days," he said.

A former Massey Hill Little League ballplayer, Underwood said he is finding "a tremendous amount of satisfaction in working with this group."

He also serves as the minister of music directing the adult and youth choirs at the church on Southern Avenue.

Underwood participated in a mission program for the Southern Baptist Church in Haiti recently. Approximately 20 persons went for counseling and church leadership.

In addition to his church and youth activities, Underwood, who is single, enjoys playing the guitar and singing and all types of sports.

After completing his work at Campbell, Underwood is planning to attend Southern Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Whatever he does in the future, it will continue to feature his relationship with young people.