
By Rich Oppel, Editor

I will tell you a story about Christmas and the secret of Charlotte, a story of the incredible volume of good deeds done anonymously, of people black and white, who work together quietly to make life better. Last Friday, four men came to see me. Charles Mack, pastor of Progressive Baptist Church, was wearing a V-neck sweater with a bold green-and-gold argyle pattern.

Next came the men in suits, men who don’t like their names in the paper. They were Robert Stiles, vice president for investments, Legg Mason Wood Walker Inc., and a Calvary Church member; Jim McNair, senior vice president, McDevitt & Street Co., a member of Myers Park Presbyterian; and Lauren Steele, vice president for corporate affairs, Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated, and a member of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church.

Another group of good people seeking help in spreading the word about a worthy project. But this story was different:

In 1946, Pastor Mack was born in Cheraw, S.C. He
The currency of Christmas is hope, help for the future

Church

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saw how the men who came to visit her mother shared her burdens and sorrows, and he would never forget.

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'You have done the kindness to one of me, to me.'"

Charles Mack wound up in a Columbia reform school at 13, and after a year and a half abandoned church and city. But the city was too big for him, so he moved to Monroe, but there was too much for him. He drifted to Charleston to clean floors, and eventually arrived at Charlotte. Mac, as he was called, was a little black church with a white picket fence by Daniel Stowe Boulevard. The average family income is $18,000. Thirty percent of the families are headed by women. Men are there, but gone off to the right. Like property set on fire. Last year, 300 men were reported in Monroe for the 16 percent of the families.

"I started a Bible class," he said. "And the kids wanted to talk about the crime and ignorance. But we made it so great, the kids wanted to talk about it. Children were having children, and the young fathers were having children. The children were the last ones to have their picture taken, and they would get kicked out.""But as many received him, to them he gave the right to become sons of God, even to them who believed on his name." - John 1:12

The men and I listened. "We work with the girls, and talk to them," said Charles Mack's daughter, Howie. "They start out with a computer, and they get to the point where they will do anything for a computer. They will do anything for that, and then it's a whole different story." Hard times: Deny Brown has seen how in Lincolnton school district, where she teaches fourth grade, that she can taught. "When I'm down, when I've got three kids on drugs, I just hold up a chart and a natural table. They got dropped out of school in high school. It's not because they can't do it. It's because they won't do it."

Ferber, YMCA district vice president, said the children's program is completely supported by volunteer work. "We give them confidence to work. We give them confidence to be a productive citizen in the community." The programs offer opportunities for employment, "I've been there when Pastor Mack has come to see me about the children on the Shore Road. They talk about opening new churches. I'll tell him the way it falls to you. You have to wonder how the community is growing up."... Cabinet, in NC said, "Somebody who breaks him. He is a good man. He is my brother in Christ.""Then they said to him, 'Go out of the way, devil, of the ascendant, and cast your eyes low on the face of the Lord,'" - Matthew 20:15.

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By ANGELA WRIGHT
Staff Writer

The next day an officer drove him 87 miles to the John G. Richards Industrial School for Negro Boys in Columbus.

It was reform school, and it changed his life. For the first time, Chick had structure, discipline and people who taught him to take responsibility for his actions. And they showed him something more: forgiveness.

He's come a long way from the little boy who grew up poor and angry, much like many of the children he encounters daily.

Mack was one of nine children — each fathered by a different man — living in a two-room house with no running water.

The house, which leaned to one side as if it would collapse, sat on a 300-acre homestead, just down the hill from the main house: a nine-room structure with two screened porches. Mack's mother, Alice, worked in the big house for the Rivers family and in a small roadside cafe on S.C. 9.

It was tough raising all those kids alone, and the young Mack soon learned he could rebel without restrain.

"We were taught when we were too exhausted, or too lonely, or overburdened, to follow through on disciplining the children," Mack says. "The thing that I was missing most was a father-like figure."

Encounters with 'Zorro'

His mother could not protect him from the white police officer who would drop by Mack's house or school, take him into the woods and use him to train a boxer-bulldog.

The off-duty cop always wore black casual clothes and drove a big black Mercury. Folks called him 'Zorro.'

He drove the 9-year-old deep into the woods with his dog.

When Zorro stopped the car, he made Mack find a twig. Through a slight window opening, the boy had to poke at the dog until it was charged around inside. The dog, eyes seemed to turn red and the car would rock as the 7-pound beast charged around inside.

Then the games began. Zorro allowed Mack a head start of about four car lengths before he'd open the door and let the angry dog chase the boy. Mack outstripped the wind, vaulting for the nearest tree he could climb to safety.

"Who is to blame for you standing here unemployeed with no money in your pockets?" he asks.

"Who is to blame for you putting junk into your body?"

Forgiveness. Personal responsibility. These are the lessons he tries to teach.

Building a community center

He's committed. Twice a week, his church serves lunch to the needy. Each weekday, students come for after-school tutorial sessions. There's a preschool program and counseling for drug and alcohol abusers.

Volunteers come from inside and outside the community. Robert Stiles, a Calvary Church member and a vice president at a local brokerage firm, has tutored at the church four years.

Mack's commitment is contagious, says Stiles: "Observing him, you can't help but get more involved. I've just never seen anybody sacrifice like him. He just gives and gives."
A day when 2 churches join hands

By DIANNE WHITACRE
Staff Writer

The purple cloth draped on the central cross outside Progressive Baptist Church is a visible sign that Easter is coming.

Today, the cloth will be removed as the church on Clanton Road celebrates Jesus' victory over death.

"It represents the presence of the Holy Spirit and its work in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ," said the Rev. Charles Mack. "We remove it Sunday after we celebrate his resurrection."

Easter starts at Progressive Baptist with sunrise service. Members from Progressive Baptist, a congregation of black people, and Westminster Presbyterian, a congregation of white people, gather on the lawn of Progressive Baptist to sing beloved songs like "At the Cross" and "He Arose." Nearby are the three crosses that stand year-round on the lawn.

Both congregations then go inside, and the associate minister from Westminster gives a message.

"Then we have breakfast and a time of fellowship. We talk and love each other. We've been doing this five years. It serves as a time to build bridges," Mack said.

The two churches have a long relationship. They tutor children from nearby Dalton Village.

Another tradition at the Easter worship service later that morning is the hymn choir, which sings a cappella, Mack said.

"We talk about the rapture, about the return of Christ. The church is filled with people. And everyone wears their pretty clothes," he said.