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Jerome Sturm / Times-News

Members of the choir sing 'Christ is Risen' to the faithful at a joint service Monday night at First Baptist Church on Apple Street. The service continued cooperation between black and white Baptist churches.

Church groups strive for unity

By ROBIN DEACLE
Times-News

It was just like heaven Monday night for worshipers at First Baptist Church on Apple Street.

"Tonight is a foretaste of what heaven is going to look like," said the Rev. Donaldson Jones. "Everybody's not going to look like you. We are not black or white. We are one in Christ."

Jones, founder and pastor of the Great Commission Baptist Church, was speaking at his church's first revival. The evening wasn't special because it was a first, but because it continued a cooperation between a black Baptist church and a white Baptist church.

The Rev. Larry Lamberth, pastor at Harvest Baptist Church, knew Jones before he started looking for a home for his new church. Last summer, the traditionally white Harvest Baptist opened its doors and let the new black church worship there.

"It's worked out great," Lamberth said. "There's been no problems."

Harvest worships Sunday morning, and members of Great Commission Baptist Church arrive for afternoon ser-

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vices. The two ministers often fill in at the pulpit for each other.

Monday night, Harvest's choir sang for Great Commission's service. The ushers made sure the service ran smoothly. Lamberth admitted some of his congregation was a little nervous beforehand, and he was even a little unsure of his role in the process.

"But we're glad to be here," Lamberth said. "This is a visible sign of cooperation."

Jones said he believed this is one way to improve race relations.

"With O.J. Simpson and all these hate groups and (Nation of Islam leader Louis) Farrakhan we have still been able to worship together," Jones said. "Whites and blacks are coming together in this kind of setting for the mutual cause of Christian evangelism."

The result didn't look much different than a normal church service. People thanked God for bringing them safely through another day and asked his blessings for their family and friends. Singing and praying echoed off the sanctuary's rafters.

Lamberth, who presided over the evening service, agreed it was a good example of blacks and whites working together.

"Certainly if we can't rally around the cause of Christ, what can we rally around?" Lamberth said.

The Rev. Dr. E.J. Jones, chairman of the board of evangelism for the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc., also spoke to the combined congregation Monday night. The convention is the oldest and largest black organization in the world.