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CLIPPING SERVICE
1115 HILLSBORO
RALEIGH, NC 27603
TEL. (919) 833-2079

MORNING STAR
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Ben Steelman

TV Close-up

Local video show has a message

Music video shows are nothing new on cable television. Yet *Let There Be Praise*, a special airing locally this week on the ACTS channel, is notable in several respects.

For one thing, the program was locally produced and features a Wilmington resident, Ken Rivenbark. For another, it offers a fascinating example of how churches and other local organizations can use new electronic technology for traditional purposes.

Let There Be Praise is a full-length video version of Rivenbark's newly-released album of the same name.



Steelman

The LP of Christian music, recorded at The Sounding Board studios in Easley, S.C., and released by Rivenbark's Creative Evangelism Ministries, is available in audio cassette from Cox Christian Bookstore and Logos Books in Wilmington.

In the Wilmington area, viewers can tune in *Let There Be Praise* at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday and again at 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 20, on Vision Cable's Channel 32.

Rivenbark said his program has aimed "at all audiences, but particularly young people."

That's a group for which Rivenbark feels a real affinity. The Penderlea native teaches at Long Creek-Grady Elementary School in Pender County.

At the same time, Rivenbark — who was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1983 — travels extensively in North and South Carolina as an evangelist, under a commission from Wilmington's Calvary Baptist Church, where he and his wife Leslie are members.

He has worked as a camp pastor for a church camp in South Carolina and has been a member of college revival teams.

More recently, however, Rivenbark has been spreading the Word with different means, through programs of music, puppetry and clowning.



Rivenbark

He uses two clown characters to carry his message: "Roamer," an "invisible" sad clown, and "Sparkles," a carnival-style clown who tells stories, gives chalk talks, makes balloon animals and does magic tricks. Sparkles' white make-up, Rivenbark said, symbolizes Christ.

"People are coming around," he said. "They're feeling a little freer in their worship services, and

they're more willing to use things, like clowning, to reach people."

Often, the method seems to work. Rivenbark said that his Creative Evangelism programs had drawn 26 "professions of faith" in recent months.

Traditional churches are also experimenting with television as a medium. That's where ACTS comes in.

Launched in May 1984 by the Southern Baptist Convention, ACTS is a satellite-cable network, originating in Fort Worth, Texas. Its programming is a potpourri of Christian "family" entertainment, ranging from conventional church services to talk shows to documentaries to Westerns.

Like its parent denomination, ACTS encourages grassroots control and initiative. The network encourages Baptist groups to arrange their own "feeds" into the system with local programming.

In the Wilmington area, the Wilmington Baptist Association arranges one hour of local programming each night.

So far, most of these programs have been videotapes of services at area churches, said Bob W. Farrer, the association's ACTS coordinator. However, the organization wants to branch out into other types of shows.

"Ken's is one of the first" of this kind, Farrer said, and if area Baptists have their way, he won't be the last. Farrer said the group is studying various options, such as religious dramas.

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This week, WWAY-TV3 will again broadcast the *Weekend With the Stars* telethon for the United Cerebral Palsy campaign. The gala will run continuously from 11 p.m. Saturday until 7 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 18.

Again, WWAY will broadcast its local segments live from the center court of Independence Mall. Station celebrities such as Richard and Jill Rogers, Stella Shelton and Gene Motley serving as emcees.

And actor Michael Storm — familiar to soap opera fans as Dr. Larry Woleck on *One Life to Live* — will make a guest appearance for the appeal, said WWAY Station Manager George Allen. Storms will be available for photos with fans, with the cost of the pictures going to the telethon.

"Cut-ins" are also planned from phone centers in Whiteville, Southport, Burgaw and Myrtle Beach, S.C., Allen said. Several of the cut-ins will local comic and commentator C.O. "Hayseed" Thomas.

Viewers can phone in pledges, or drop them in a fish bowl at the mall, Allen said.

In this area, pledges will go to the United Cerebral Palsy Development Center at 2035 Oleander Drive. The center, serving a four-county area, provides speech and physical therapy, developmental education and other services to cerebral palsy victims between the ages of 18 months and 5 years.

Other UCP fund-raisers in this area will include a square dance at 8 p.m. Saturday at Burgaw's Cripple Creek Corner, and another effort to build "North Carolina's Largest Cookie" with help from donors and the Great American Chocolate Chip Cookie Co. at Independence Mall.

For information, call the Wilmington UCP office at 799-8737.