

RELIGION

Vancouver Baptist Celebrates Anniversary

Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, 3138 N. Vancouver Ave., is celebrating its 59th anniversary with several special events. All members old and new are invited to join services on Thursday, March 11 at 7 p.m., Friday, March 12 at 7 p.m., a celebration that includes a "potluck supper" on Saturday, March 13 and a special Sunday, March 14 event at 3:30 p.m.

The church is one of Portland's oldest African-American congregations. The late civil rights leader, Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., visited the congregation during a visit to Portland during the 1960s.

Al Green Enters Gospel Hall of Fame

(AP) — Al Green and Sandi Patty led a diverse quartet of industry veterans inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

"We always want to honor the spectrum of music that has the gospel in it," said Gospel Music Association President John Styll. "For us, it's not about the style, it's about the message, and it's a way of showing that the gospel can be packaged in any number of ways."

Also inducted Thursday were Vestal Goodman, who died in December of flu complications, and BMI President Frances W. Preston.

Green said he wasn't recognized by the music's Grammy Awards community until he made a gospel record.

"I made records and records and records and didn't win a one. I come to Nashville, cut a gospel record, and they give me two," he said.

Patty, the all-time Dove Award leader among female artists with 39, said she appreciates the growth and diversity of gospel music.

"I'm a mom of many teenagers, and I'm thrilled there are groups out there like Third Day and MercyMe that my kids absolutely love, and they're not only getting great music, but they're getting good stuff for their heart, too," she said.



Al Green is inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. (AP photo)

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Meditate On Positive Things

BY ETHEL J. BATES
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Phil. 4:8, says "Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

The significance of these words can be appreciated only when we picture the environment from which they were penned—a filthy first-century prison. How could Paul write about such positive things, in such a negative place? Why didn't he mention the stench, the cold, the bugs, the mistreatment, the loneliness, and the poor nourishment suffered in the prison from which he was writing?

The answer to this question is found in the verse itself. Paul didn't want the church at Philippi—or us—to focus on the negatives. In this joyous book, he tells us to center our thinking on positives things of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy.

If we are constantly thinking about our negative circumstances, we never will have peace. Our

thought patterns are extremely important to our mental, physical and spiritual health. We can literally think ourselves into mental and physical distress. Doctors attest to the fact that a large percentage of physical illness has a psychological basis.

What are you meditating on? What is your mind murmuring to your heart? As we move into 2004 what "things" have you not left behind? What injustice have you not forgiven, and how does one get

Satan knows our weaknesses and our strengths, just as God does, and in this narrative Paul is persistent in his warning to us. He says, "Don't copy the customs of this world" that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Wise Christians decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them. Our refusal to conform to this world's values however, must go even deeper than just behavior and customs, it must be firmly planted in our mind: "Let God



Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. —Ethel J. Bates

transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."

This Scripture really helped me recently, as I was dealing with a personal issue. I knew in my heart the right thing to do;

a joyful heart? Through joyful circumstances? No. Paul's circumstances were not joyful. There was nothing joyful about being in prison. But he said, "I have learned to be content in whatever situation I found myself. This contentment that Paul speaks about, comes only as the result of a right relationship with God, and allowing his word to "renew" your mind. Paul wrote, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

yet I struggled to transfer that knowledge into action. It was a spiritual warfare between that old sinful nature, and the new Christian that the Holy Spirit is developing within me. When we spend time meditating on God's precepts, mandates and principles, and invite the Holy Spirit to renew, reeducate, and redirect our minds we will be truly transformed.

Ethel J. Bates is a minister for the Allen Temple AME Church in Portland.

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