

Easter Burglary Stopped in Progress

Pastor wonders if incident was race-related

BY SARAH BLOUNT
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Members of New Paradise Worship Center in Gresham came very close to getting an ugly Easter surprise — but the attempt to rob them of approximately \$20,000 worth of church equipment was foiled before assailants could get off with the gear.

Church member Gail Kindler happened to drive by around 4 a.m. Easter Sunday on the way home from her night shift, and discovered computers, printers, monitors, musical equipment and a brand new copy machine piled outside the building next to a vehicle. She said one computer was being used to prop open a side door.

Kindler, who does maintenance

work at New Paradise, called 9-1-1 before the car drove off from the parking lot — without the pricey equipment.

Gresham police arrived shortly after and church pastor Rev. Dwayne O. Fleming was alerted by a call around 7 a.m. from Rev. Al Cushway of Highland Community Church, a congregation that shares the building.

According to the Gresham police report, the vandals caused \$850 worth of damages to a window and six kicked-in doorframes leading to offices, plus damage to a water gutter. Police made no arrests and have no suspect information.

Members of New Paradise were able to meet for an Easter Sunday service because of the minimal damage. By Monday afternoon, most of the equipment was once again intact.

Fleming said it looked like a theft situation gone awry, but he can't help but wonder if the vandals tar-

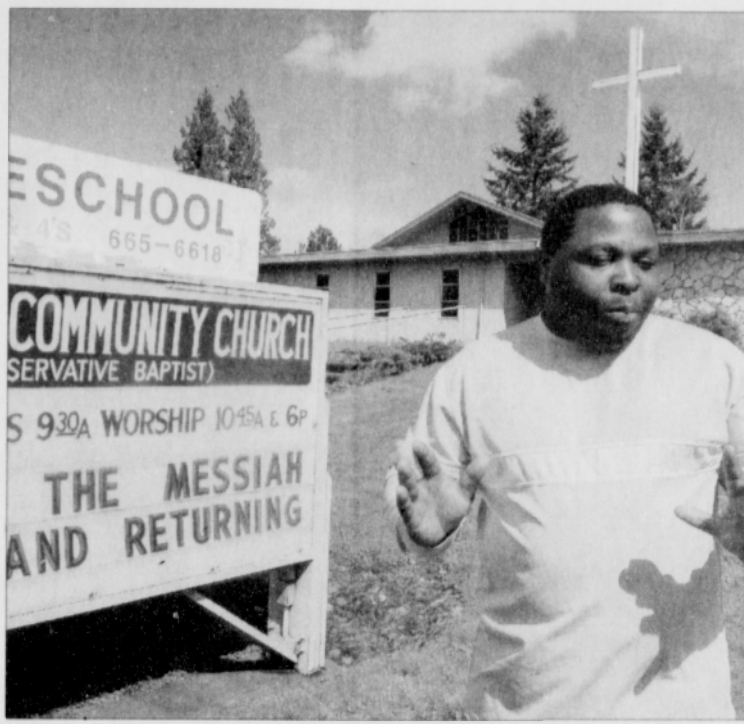


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Rev. Dwayne O. Fleming, pastor of New Paradise Worship Center in Gresham, wonders if vandals targeted the church because of its racial diversity.

geted the African American church because of race.

The year-old non-denominational Christian church has about 40 members, Fleming said, with about 60 percent of members who are white and 40 percent African American. New Paradise joins a few other Gresham churches with diverse demographics, and Fleming said he chose the East County location to represent the increasing minority population.

"We moved out here because of the displacement in northeast," said the former Vancouver resident and previous music minister at Morning Star Baptist Missionary Church, which burned down in February after a fire of an undetermined cause engulfed the historic building.

Fleming said that in the days before the break-in, church leaders had placed at least 100 signs the size of political placards around the area of Southeast 182nd Avenue

and Powell Boulevard. The signs, featuring a photo of Fleming and his wife Tamara, invite the community to visit New Paradise.

"This seemed to happen right after that," Fleming said.

Expressing relief that no parishioners were hurt, Fleming said the break-in has led him to consider a security system, but he also wants to get the word out that there is a burgeoning minority-based faith community east of I-205.

"It's been a great challenge so far," he said, "especially with what's been happening to minority churches in the past few months."

Fleming and his wife Tamara have applied for non-profit status and offer drug and alcohol treatment within their ministry. Fleming said he is involved in several community development initiatives in Gresham and meets regularly with Gresham Police Chief Carla Piluso and other city leaders.

State Takes Custody of Newborn; Couple Keeps Up Hope

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
PORTLAND OBSERVER

Newly transplanted Portlanders Claudia Davis and Nathaniel Hodges are living a nightmare.

Moving here six months ago, they planned to begin a better life on the West Coast. But they are instead spending every waking moment in pursuit of the right to care for their own three-month-old child.

The worst was realized during the cross-country trip from Boston, after a falling-out with traveling companions. This other couple called the Oregon Department of Human Services, alleging that Davis and Hodges carried on a dangerously abusive relationship.

Given Hodges' criminal record and Davis' abusive ex-husband, the tip caused DHS to closely monitor the progress of Davis' pregnancy. When Alexandria Hodges was born Dec. 28 at Legacy Emanuel Hospital, DHS took immediate custody, citing "reasonable cause for threat of harm."

The couple barely had time to pose for a photo-op with their daughter before the infant was whisked away to foster care with the presence of armed security personnel.

Hodges says, "There must be a better way, because when DHS gets a report, they don't even give the family a chance to demonstrate their ability to parent."

The case caught the attention of East-County NAACP coordinator Ruth Pitts-London, who is also Alexandria's godmother.

"I certainly support DHS conducting investigations when there have been allegations of abuse or neglect," she says, "but they need to notify the parties involved on the front end, and be trying to keep families intact rather than immediately breaking them apart."

Pitts-London sees the dispute as an example of "the criminal-justice and social-service systems working together to support racism."

The couple must attend six weekly classes geared to parenting skills, drug abuse pre-



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Nathaniel Hodges and Claudia Davis hold photographs that picture themselves and their newborn baby just before it was taken by Oregon Department of Human Services personnel

vention and identifying domestic violence. In the meantime, the NAACP has helped secure the couple an April 18 hearing with a Multnomah County judge who will determine whether the child should be returned.

DHS has allowed Davis and Hodges 90-minute visits with their child every Tuesday, but

last week the foster parent called DHS asserting that Alexandria was sick, and the visit was cancelled.

Horrified, the couple went to DHS' caseload supervisor Don Lehman, who said "the biggest problem for us as an agency is the one to two hours a week of visitation; we don't really have the funds for any of this." He couldn't give them any more information about Alexandria's status.

Davis said, "You're not giving us any time to bond with our baby."

Lehman's response: "Unfortunately, we're going to err on the child's safety; it's a crazy system, but you've just got to bear with us."



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For more information, please call 503 418-3603 or email pact@ohsu.edu

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eIRB# 2071

The Portland Observer Established 1970
USPS 959-680
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

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Send address changes to Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year
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Dr. Billy R. Flowers

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An ongoing series of questions and answers about America's natural healing profession.

Part 1. CHIROPRACTIC: For the best in natural healing, hearing is believing.

Q: How did Chiropractic care come about?

A: Spinal manipulations have been practiced for over 2,500 years. Hippocrates, the "Father of Medicine," advised: "look well to the spine for the cause of disease." But modern Chiropractic came of age back in 1895. In Davenport, Iowa, a patient came to Dr. D.D. Palmer complaining of back pain. This patient had also been nearly deaf since suffering a back injury 17 years earlier. Dr. Palmer noticed a bump on the patient's back, which he suspected was related to a dislocated vertebra. To relieve the

patient's pain and reposition the vertebra, Dr. Palmer placed him on a table and pushed down on his back, performing a spinal manipulation or "adjustment." He performed this adjustment three days in a row. By the third day, not only had the patient's back pain disappeared, his hearing reappeared. Today's Chiropractors know that the central nervous system (housed within the body's spinal column) provides the energy, which governs all bodily functions. By making sure that

the spinal column is in correct alignment, Chiropractors eliminate any possible interference, which would prevent the central nervous system from keeping the body functioning the way nature intended.

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