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Community Grows by Seeing
Green
For PE's James Town

By ROB CHAPMAN

RICE — It's 11 a.m. and the sun beams through the open front door of Jamestown Presbyterian Church.

A handful of youngsters are seated aloft on a bench seat in the balcony and a mixture fill seats in the sanctuary of the high ceiling, old country church below.

Still, it is not an usual Sunday morning down this winding country road. Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee and renowned Washington Redskins cornerback, Darrell Green, is waiting behind the pulpit about to take a more grander stage than that of a mere football field.

But, there's something more, here, too, that many hope will have life beyond the benediction.

This gathering of souls is the next step for two churches with shared roots and different denominations emanating from the same community. Jamestown Presbyterian, which is white, and High Bridge Union Baptist Church, which is black, have joined together to build upon a covenant the two congregations signed and exchanged nearly a year ago.

"Another step," offers 85-year-old Samuel V. Wilson would later offer. "Another step in the direction of greater peace and understanding."

Wilson pauses then adds, "The community was once deeply divided. The distance that separated us becomes less and less each time we get together."

Wilson breaks conversational stride as an African American woman, a member of the R. R. Moton Museum's Board of Directors stops to chat. They talk health. He tells her he's 85, thinking he's older. She, not looking anywhere close to her age, informs him she's 87.

"Oh, I have to walk to your left," Wilson relates.

Two people talking about life.

What has brought this community together originally began with its simple "James Town" name. County officials met in preparation to celebrate the more historic and well-known 1607 settlement near Williamsburg's 400th anniversary event held last year. With a James Town of their own, a settlement on the Appomattox River east of Farmville, it was a natural.

The settlement is long gone but buried beneath the leaves in nearly forgotten pages of time was the foundation of a church, a building that had, at times, served both white and black congregations.

The surviving cemetery has the graves of both races—separated in life, together in death.

The proclamations exchanged by the two congregations in the fall of 2007 bind the two—expresses a firm intent to preserve, perfect and perpetuate positive values of their common heritage by establishing the chapel in the woods where both congregations began as a memorial and a meeting place for all who, under God, love freedom; and that by seeking God's grace and using all earthly means available they pledge to build upon the faith, hope, vision and courage of forbears, by covenanting to teach, practice and proclaim God's love and justice for all persons for all times and in all places.

The proclamation also states a common purpose—that they love God and one another "in humble awareness of our shared lives...and that we pursue God's peace in the land... And that we fold to our hearts our brothers and sisters, following in the steps of His son, Jesus..."

Words, yes, but lasting, foundational words to build upon.

This fall day in 2008 marked the sixth such joint venture and the first since the exchange of covenants.

"We have laughed together, we have prayed together, we have broken bread together. We have worshiped together. We have embraced together and I can say that there's been an altogether wonderful experience which we have shared," Jamestown Presbyterian Church Moderator Dr. Rev. William Wilson offers in the service.

In the course of this event, High Bridge Baptist Choir, accompanied by Robin Buckalew, deliver the haunting rendition of *Roll On Sweet River*, the words of which were penned by Rev. Wilson based on Psalm 46.

It is more than a new song they are learning to sing.

It is their song.

Sweet river, roll on;

Heal us with thy soothing balm.

Sweet river, river roll;

Heal our divisions, make us whole.

Roll on, roll on, sweet river.

Roll on, sweet river roll on.

It offers a haunting, spiritual tone.

High Bridge Union Baptist Church Co-Pastor Rev. Reginald Hurt reads the day's scripture: 1 Cor. 13, also known as the Bible's love chapter. A white man moves over and shares a Bible with a black woman on one side of the church; and black man and a white woman share a Bible a few rows up near the center.

"...You're the first apple seed," Green tells them. "And that seed produces a tree that (produces) millions of apples that has within them seeds. So then you're the first seed that will produce more seeds, more apples, more trees."

It's because, he believes, of what God is doing in this community.

"No one here snuck in here," Green says. "No one snuck under God's radar. Everyone here is under God's purpose and design."

It is, he tells them, a "significant hour."

Green, who attends a multi-racial, cultural church in Chantilly, also offered, "What we're trying to get done here is pretty divine to me. This is better than beating the Cowboys. ...And, guess what, you got to be here."

The day's events may well be the kick-off for a new community season here in the Jamestown. Wilson, a retired Army General and former president of Hampden-Sydney College, extended the invite to the football great long before his induction to the Hall of Fame.

And, even though Green could regale both young and old alike with gridiron triumphs through his storied 20 years in the NFL, today football is a mere extra point. The score for this five foot nine inch cornerback is Christ.

"...I sense that it's going to continue," Rev. R. Hurt said. "And I certainly believe that it's divine. I believe it's a divine effort for God and I think it's going to continue. And I see that the love is getting greater between the two congregations."

Co-Pastor Eva Hurt is not surprised that it has continued—again assessing it's divine.

"I think that through the effort—the beginnings of the effort—you could see...more people getting involved..." she said, adding the "people can see the movement...of love and unity and I think mostly now it's a sincerity thing instead of just a getting together thing."

Both say they feel their love when they walk into the building.

They reach out in love and feel it returning to them.

"It's not (an) effort thing, it's a..." Rev. E. Hurt begins.

"No," Rev. R. Hurt chimes in. "It's just happening."

An anniversary, of course, is on the horizon and a return to the Chapel in the Woods.

Wilson, who grew up here, envisions the two congregations continuing holding joint worship services once a quarter, perhaps more often. They have established a steering group, a "covenant action team," which has the task of fulfilling what the two congregations have vowed to one another.

They've got to do such things as exchange church directories, Wilson highlights, so that they know of births, deaths or marriages.

Ties that bind even tighter.

"Not just for a worship service, but to where we can live and function more constructively and helpfully during the other days of the week," Wilson said.

They have to follow through, he cited, in practical, every day terms for what they've started to ever have any true meaning.

The relationship has, however, already come a long way.

Prince Edward Economic Development Director Sharon Carney helped coordinate 2007 James Town events noted that after last year's program and the covenant promise the onus was "kind of on them to see how they wanted to move forward."

She added, "...They're the ones that wanted to do this. ...I wanted to facilitate, but they wanted to do this and they've come a long way from the very first program together 'til now and it's very enlightening to see how they've grown together."

Brothers and sisters.

The hope, of course, is that energy will be ignited and that the baton will be passed to a younger generation.

Maybe even a movement that will spread.

"If someone hasn't been a witness to how they've grown, you wouldn't understand if you just came today," Ms. Carney said. "It looks like just a really interesting service with a great speaker, but you have to understand how they've grown as a community. I think that's the most marvelous thing."

She pauses, then adds, "It isn't a one-time shot. It's changing a way of life."

Dr. Wilson, 90-years young, noting that he couldn't hear good and can hardly see, labored on in detailing the history of the community effort early in the service.

"...If I can't see you, I can feel the vibration from you.... I love you."

He was greeted with an "amen."