

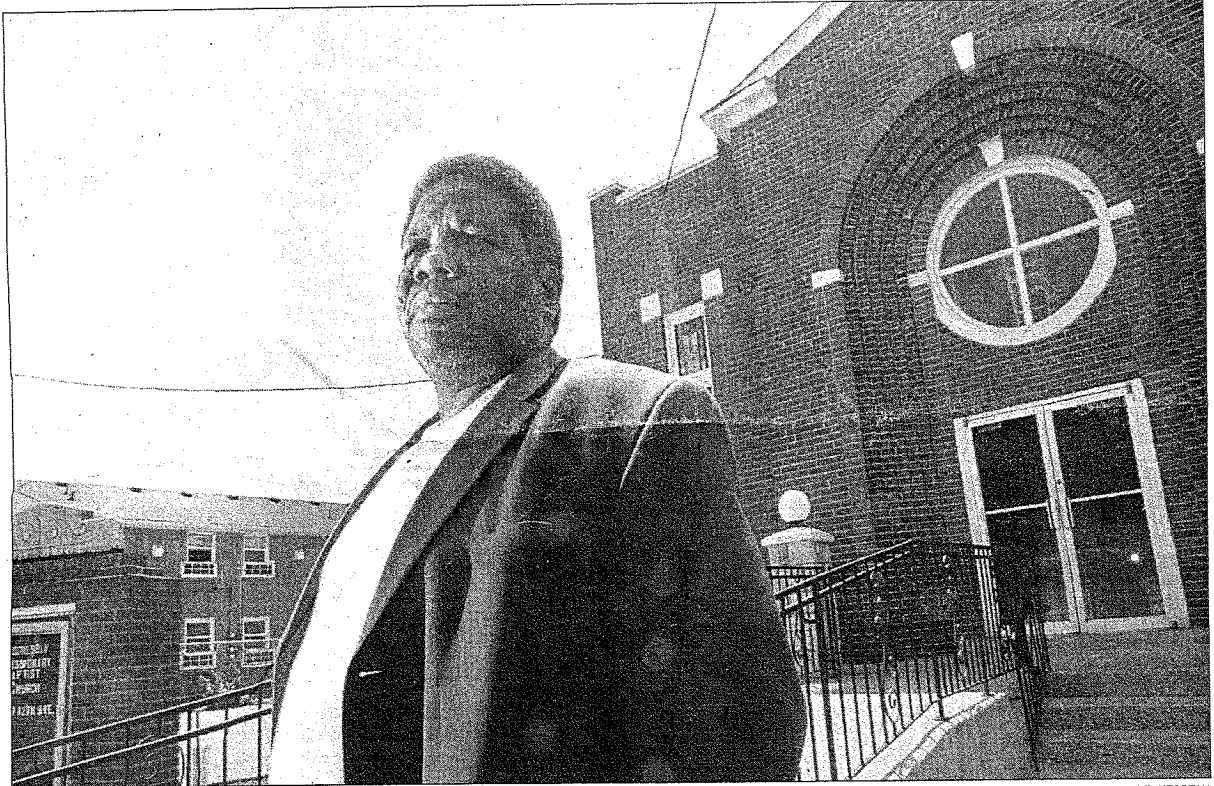
## INSIDE

American independence similar to Israelites' exodus, Deacon John R. Vile says in the Message of the Week. On Page 5B.

## FAITH &amp; VALUES

SATURDAY, JULY 1, 2006

## FAITH IN ACTION



DIPTI VAIDYA / THE TENNESSEAN

The Rev. Henry Blaze stands in front of Progressive Baptist Church. He says the ministry of working at Second Harvest "empowers, treats people with humanity."

## From worn trailer, pastor doles out hope

Preacher and volunteers give the hungry food, respect and the gospel

By **TIM GHIANNI**  
Senior Writer

The fresh linoleum floor in the trailer lobby proves the Rev. Henry Blaze is moving toward his goal of saving the community.

"I was just working on a new brochure to try to raise money to replace the rest of it. Lot of traffic here, wearing it out."

The 51-year-old preacher nods from the lobby of the double-wide to the bustling offices and warehouse shelves.

Volunteers, coordinated by Associate Minister Natalie Nelson, rapidly pull food items from shelves and fill Second Harvest emergency food boxes in assembly-line fashion, just barely keeping ahead of the needy who come here for staples.

"I'm a people person," says Nelson, between hollering friendly greetings to Edgeland-area residents who seek nourishment inside the yellow trailer in the Progressive Missionary Baptist Church parking lot.

"Being here gives me the opportunity to be in the heart of an area some people have given up on," says Nelson, herself a volunteer. "A touch or a hug might help them. It's needed here."

The boxes link those who need and those who help at the 12th Avenue South church out-

### ABOUT FAITH IN ACTION

In this spot, we will present the stories of people of all ages, denominations and creeds whose faith has led them to exemplary or unusual actions. If you know someone like this, we would like to hear from you. Please contact Tim Ghianni at 259-8048 or [tghianni@tennessean.com](mailto:tghianni@tennessean.com).

See previous installments of the Faith in Action series by doing a keyword search for **FAITH at Tennessean.com**.

reach.

"There's nothing more basic or fundamental than folks just being able to get bread. We all have to do that at some point," says Blaze, noting he's feeding inner-city souls as much as bellies.

"In terms of the Gospel, that speaks to the community. Dr. King called it 'beloved community.' Jesus called it 'the Kingdom of God.' It's where our humanity is affirmed, our dignity and value as human beings is protected, nurtured and cultivated."

By treating the needy with respect and offering food, handshakes and hugs without question, the pastor and his church

reinforce the humanity of the hungry.

The "all-in-this-together" attitude — which for two decades has meant this church acts as an outlet for Second Harvest — fuels pride and self-respect.

From the yellow double-wide, his pulpit on poverty, the pastor attempts to unify and educate so people learn how to help themselves and their community survive.

He has talked to them about the TennCare changes and options. And he rallies the troops against things like school lunch program cuts, which "hurt children whose parents are the ones who come for emergency food boxes." More cuts in lunch programs means more people who need Second Harvest outlets and similar outreaches.

The education of the community is an offshoot of the love dispensed in the yellow double-wide. "This historically is our primary ministry," the pastor says as more Second Harvest clients shuffle out the door with bulging boxes.

The worn trailer demonstrates the quantity of need and service.

While Second Harvest provides the food and volunteers provide the muscle, Blaze's small congregation of 40 active mem-

bers budgets \$8,000 per year for maintenance and operational costs of the trailer.

"We got this part done," says the pastor, pointing to the new linoleum. "But we're having to redo the whole thing. It takes a beating, with people coming in here to get their boxes, other people working in here."

"And right now we don't have any funding source other than the church. That's why I'm doing this brochure."

He also fears that the needs of his clientele could easily be forgotten or at least obscured by the changing cityscape, as upscale residences and establishments move in, making rent steep and affordable housing increasingly scarce.

"In the redevelopment of the inner city, do poor people have a place? One of the things we're trying to do with our food bank is to reach members of this community. We know the ones who have many needs because we're here and see them on a regular basis."

Here, people are not anonymous in poverty or generosity.

"Folks appreciate the service and the affirmation we give," he says.

"This ministry empowers, treats people with humanity." ■

### CONTRIBUTE OR VOLUNTEER

- To contribute to or volunteer for the Progressive Food Bank, call 292-3362 or 292-3618. Progressive Missionary Baptist Church is at 1419 12th Ave. S.

- Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee serves 46 counties in Middle and West Tennessee.

"The organization helps individuals and families in crisis, senior citizens and the working poor, in particular," according to Susannah Shumate, vice president of marketing and public relations.

To support the organization with money, food or volunteer hours, call 329-3491 or visit [www.secondharvest-nashville.org](http://www.secondharvest-nashville.org)

Shumate says Progressive Baptist Church "has been with us a long time. They serve some critical ZIP codes with emergency food box needs."

The church serves residents in ZIP codes 37203, 37204, 37212 and 37215.

Progressive Baptist has donated 3,015 emergency food boxes since July 2005, says Shumate.

"That's a good-sized emergency food box site for us."

— TIM GHIANNI, SENIOR WRITER