

Program looks to churches to fight cancer

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

In Forsyth County, the leading cause of death for African Americans is cancer. Felecia Bennett-Giles is hoping to change that.

Bennett-Giles, an outreach educator for Cancer Services, is currently recruiting pastors and churches to participate in "Body and Soul: A Celebration of Healthy Living," a new program designed help African Americans reduce their risk of cancer.

"So many African Americans are dying from cancer in our community and don't know or aren't educated about the ways to prevent it," Bennett-Giles said. "...This (program) has given us an opportunity to talk about it and do something about it as well."

Cancer Services is a United Way partner agency with more than 50 years of service to Forsyth, Davie, Yadkin and Stokes counties. It provides an array of programs and aid to those who have been diagnosed with cancer, from massage therapy to Reiki – a palm healing technique. Supplies such as wigs and donated medical equipment are also available through the program at no charge.

Body and Soul, a grant-funded initiative that will officially launch in September, is one of Cancer Services' newest initiatives. A program of the National Cancer Institute, Body and



Photos by Layla Farmer

Bennett-Giles

Soul seeks to create healthier congregations, and in turn, communities, by promoting healthy eating and frequent exercise, which research has shown can significantly reduce one's risk of cancer.

Community gardens and organized walks before Bible school are among the suggestions Bennett-Giles is making to pastors who opt to reduce their flocks' cancer risk through Body and Soul. She is also asking that they emphasize the importance of health in their sermons and enforce the notion by making sure healthy foods are present at repasts, pot lucks and other church gatherings.

"It's going to take some time, and I'm sure there's



Pastor Waymon Monroe Jr. stands outside of Solid Rock Missionary Baptist Church.

going to be some resistance, but I feel that once the congregations are educated on it, it will come to pass," she declared. "...A healthy congregation is going to be far more effective in the Kingdom than an unhealthy one."

Educational workshops, speakers and training will be provided to churches through the program, and Bennett-Giles says she will work with faith leaders to tailor it to suit each congregation. She hopes to recruit a minimum of 20 churches to commit to taking part in the program for at least three years. Ten churches have signed up so far, and Bennett-Giles has been hard at work, visiting bible studies and Sunday services in hopes of expanding the program's reach.

Services is really dedicated to this project."

Rev. Waymon Monroe Jr., senior pastor of Solid Rock Missionary Baptist Church, where Bennett-Giles attends, was among the first to get involved in Body and Soul. The church already has an active health ministry and strives to serve healthy foods at its gatherings, Monroe said.

"I'm really concerned about the health of our congregation," commented the 39 year-old. "I want them to be spiritually growing, but I also want them to take care of their bodies, because their bodies are their temples."

Monroe has pledged to begin focusing on health more in his sermons, as part of his commitment to Body and Soul.

"The opportunity we have from the pulpit is such a huge voice that not only affects the church, but the community too," he commented. "I think it's important that we take a stand."

"It's such a great cause and it's no cost to the church; it's just our effort to help save lives," she said. "Cancer

Rev. Angela Brown Neville, pastor of Shouse Temple in Winston-Salem, invited Bennett-Giles to educate attendees of the Carolina Region Annual Conference of the CME Church about Body and Soul.

"As we help strengthen the spiritual body, we also want to give them information about how they can be healthy physically," said Brown Neville, who chaired the Health Committee for the conference, held July 19-23 at the downtown Embassy Suites hotel. "...I felt that Cancer Services was an avenue that can be a blessing to our people ... and to the various communities that we represent, individually and collectively as churches."

For more information about the Body and Soul program, contact Bennett-Giles at (336) 760-9983, (336) 671-7506 or fbgiles@cancerservicesonline.org.



Neville