

Pastors fight church burnings

By **YVONNE WHITE**

Times Religion Editor

A group of Huntsville clergy, interracial and of several denominations, wants to bring the community together to combat the recent wave of church burnings.

Ministers and other representatives from Huntsville congregations are invited to attend a meeting Wednesday as part of an anti-racism effort called "Building, Not Burning," being coordinated through the Interfaith Mission Service.

Attendees will be given green ribbons to distribute to their congregations next Sunday. The ribbon, which depicts two hands shaking, is the local emblem of the movement opposing church



Extinguish the Fires of Hatred

burnings. The green ribbon represents life, said J.D. Mauldin, who designed it. The hands are a gradient color of red, yellow, black, and white so they represent all races.

The meeting will be at 9 a.m. at the office of The Presbytery of

the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, 226 Church Street.

The emblem will represent unity in support of a positive spirit in the Huntsville community, said the Rev. Jerry Crutcher, pastor of Little Indian Creek Primitive Baptist Church.

"A lot of us (ministers) were wondering what we should do, and had been called about what we were going to do," said Crutcher, who is also president of the Greater Huntsville Interdenominational Ministerial Fellowship. "Wherever evil exists, we need to take a stand, regardless of what faith or denomination we are."

He said Dr. Harold Dowler, pastor of Huntsville's First

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Christian Church, called him recently because he felt churches needed to stand together against the burnings. They agreed to hold a planning meeting the next day and were astounded when two dozen people representing 12 different denominations showed up.

In addition to the Christian ministers, three other faith groups have expressed an interest in the program, including Baha'i, Islam and Judaism.

"I think this is a super idea to bring our community together in a positive way and say no to the burning of God's houses," said Dr. Steve Jacobs, rabbi at Temple B'nai Sholom. He also heads the city's Human Relations Commission.

The Rev. Frank Broyles, program coordinator of the National Conference (formerly National Conference of Christians and Jews), said he is "very excited" to see ministers crossing faith and racial lines who would not come over for other causes.

"There's a lot of energy in this group. But it's more than just the burning of churches; it's what's behind it that we are concerned about," he said.

"I think it's tremendous and I'm glad they are planning to do this," said the Rev. Ed Soule, pastor of Gurley and Owens Cross Roads United Methodist churches. "I will definitely be there and will encourage others to do so."

Crutcher said black ministers aren't the only ones concerned about their churches.

How to help

Contributions to cover the cost of the "Building, Not Burning" materials to be distributed Wednesday may be made to the Interfaith Mission Service, 411 Holmes Ave., Huntsville 35801.

For more information call the Rev. Jerry Crutcher at 859-1833 or Dr. Harold Dowler at 881-0150.

"What I'm hearing now is that most ministers are concerned because when you start burning one church, you never know which one will be next," said Crutcher. "We hope all ministers will make a statement about this on July 7 to kick off the program. This is not just a one-time thing because we are going to continue in our efforts to eradicate racism."

Mauldin, designer of the cards and ribbons to be distributed Wednesday, is a member at First Christian Church who is an electrical engineer at Nichols Research.

"Harold (Dowler) mentioned it to me, and it's something I feel strongly about, so I invited myself," said Mauldin. "I was willing to be involved in it, but we really didn't have a plan when we first met."

Crutcher said he hopes a pin also can be designed and sold, with the profits going to a fund for the burned churches.