

RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

Religion and the lives of soldiers

By DAMASO REYES

*AmNews European
Correspondent*

CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo — The North chapel at Camp Bondsteel sits on a hill overlooking the base where more than 1,200 men and women, mostly citizen soldiers of the National Guard, live and work trying to secure Kosovo's future. During their yearlong deployment here in the Balkans, soldiers find solace not only in the two well-equipped gyms or the nightly films shown in the movie theater but in a small, brown, wooden building on the hill, and the fellowship of their fellow soldiers within.

"If one person had shown up this evening I would be rejoicing as much as if this place were full," Spc. Carlton Yancy told his



Spc. Carlton Yancy testifies to other parishoners during a service.
(Damaso Reyes photos)

fellow soldiers during a Friday evening fellowship at the chapel. "There is a direct connection between being a soldier for your country and being a

holy warrior," he added.

While Kosovo is relatively stable, it is still defined by the Army as a combat zone where soldiers are required to carry their weapons everywhere they go on base and load them every time they drive outside the wire. Maintaining a routine is one way soldiers preserve a sense of normalcy, and for those whose lives are grounded in spirituality, the fellowship of their brothers and sisters in arms provides a powerful link to the lives they



An M-16 rifle lies on the floor of the chapel during a service. Because Kosovo is still technically a combat zone, soldiers are required to carry their weapons everywhere they go.

left behind.

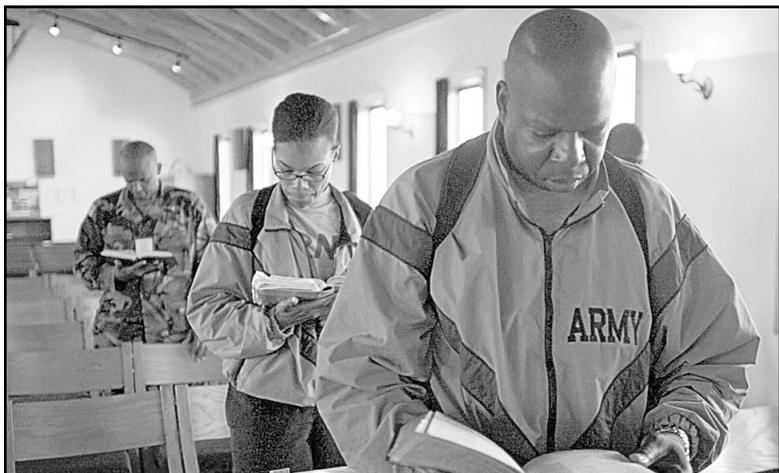
"It helps them stay rooted, it helps them to stay at peace within themselves as they face the challenge of the mission," said Lt. Col. Lawrence Hendel, a Roman Catholic priest and chaplain at Camp Bondsteel.

"You're in a combat zone so the first thing a lot of people do is embrace God, because you really don't know if you're going to live till tomorrow," said Sgt. 1st Class Bobby Grishby of Jackson, Miss. Speaking about

his relationship with religion, he added: "I think it helps me to be a better soldier, plus it helps you to be a better person."

Camp Bondsteel is the size of a small town, and for many of the soldiers who come from large urban centers like San Diego or Minneapolis, the intimate worship environment offers them an opportunity to shed the anonymity of the mega church.

"Back home I belong to a church with 2,500 members,"
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Sgt. 1st Class Bobby Grishby reads from the bible during Sunday afternoon services at the Camp Bonsteel Chapel.

Allen AME hosts Black Shopping Extravaganza Saturday

By LINDA ARMSTRONG
Special to the AmNews

This Saturday, November 5, the Allen AME Cathedral will be holding its 15th Annual Buy Black Shopping Extravaganza. The extravaganza will be held at the Allen Christian School, located at 171-10 Linden Boulevard on the corner of Linden and Merrick boulevards. It is held each year to support African American vendors and boasts an array of Afro-centric items that one can purchase to begin holiday shopping ahead of schedule.

Eighty vendors will be on hand with a selection of items including handbags; jewelry, including wearable art, gold, silver, gemstones; toys, including Holy Bears, African stick dolls and other Afro-centric dolls; silk flowers; gift baskets; balloons; candles; hair accessories; clothing for men, women and children, both contemporary and African with sizes starting from a child's small to an adult 3X; scarves, shawls, ruanas, and rope crown hats.

There will be figurines; Tupperware; spa products; soap; greeting cards; African

designed bags; books; Egyptian crafts; potpourri; ethnic magnets and praise and worship magnets; Christmas wreathes; art, including original paintings and photographs; personal planner and address books; wood carvings; perfume; Avon products; and handmade leather goods.

All vendors will have giveaways and a raffle will occur every hour. The entrance donation will be \$3. Vendors are from the local area, but also come from as far as Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Most items, except for the handmade leather, will fall in the price range of \$5-\$10.

"We try to keep the prices reasonable," said Juanita Butcher, chairperson of the Buy Black Shopping Extravaganza.

Butcher hopes that the public will come out and support this event, while getting some early holiday shopping done. "We do it to support minority owned businesses and to encourage future generations to become entrepreneurs," Butcher explained.

The Buy Black Shopping Extravaganza is sponsored by the New York Club of the Allen AME Cathedral.

Ana Pereira, executive director and founder of Heritage Housing and Community Services, passes

A champion to New York's neediest, Ana Pereira, executive director of Heritage Housing and Community Services, an organization she helped to found 28 years ago as part of Heritage Health and Housing, Inc., passed away October 30, 2005. She was returning to New York from Canada when taken gravely ill as she awaited a connection flight in Detroit.

Ms. Pereira was a beloved figure in New York City community action circles. During her nearly three-decade tenure at Heritage Housing and Community Services, her vision, drive and determination transformed a storefront operation into a widely respected service and development agency with a staff of 165 and annual budget of \$10 million. Ms. Pereira also oversaw the expansion of Heritage Housing and Community Services throughout Harlem and into the Bronx and parts of the Upper West Side.

Only a few weeks ago, on October 11, 2005, Ana Pereira was honored at the agency's 35th anniversary & gala fundraiser at Tavern on the Green, where she was feted by such preeminent New Yorkers as former Mayor David Dinkins, actress Ruby Dee and City Council Member Gail Brewer.

Working out of AIA award-winning headquarters at 416 West 127th Street, Ms. Pereira coordinated the development of five completed residences for



ANA PEREIRA

special needs tenants, with another one currently under construction and two more in planning. In addition, the agency currently leases 100 more units for its consumers.

Under Ms. Pereira's supervision, Heritage Housing and Community Services developed a reputation as an agency willing to take on the most difficult cases and help individuals transform their lives through programs providing a full continuum of care, from 24-hour/7-day-a-week supervision to semi-independent living. Working with the mentally ill, substance abusers, individuals with HIV/AIDS, the homeless and ex-offenders, the agency, through Ms. Pereira's strong, personal leadership, helped its clients achieve independence and become contributing members of their communities.

Ms. Pererira, who knew most of the agency's clients by name, also helped sponsor programs of com-

munity development. She leaves a legacy of commitment to integrating the agency's programs and clients into the neighborhoods in which they were located.

Prior to starting Heritage Housing and Community Services, Ms. Pereira worked in various capacities for the New York City Housing Authority. From 1972 to 1978, she was a district supervisor for community services and managed a district office responsible for community services in 35 different housing developments. At the time, she was responsible for agency budgets totaling \$25 million. From 1969 to 1972, she was director of the Senior Advocacy Services in the Bronx, responsible for training and supervising case workers who provided services for homebound elderly.

As trained social worker who received her master's degree from New York University School of Social Work with an accreditation from the Association of Certified Social Workers (ACSW), her entire professional career was focused on helping others. Ms. Pereira leaves behind scores of devoted friends and clients and a close family that includes her brother Pedro Pereira, Jr.; sister Esther (Begi) Pereira Mitchell; nephew David W. Mitchell, Jr.; nieces Eugenia "Patsy" Mitchell, Josephine Pereira, and Eileen Pereira-Arndt; step-daughter Kari Sigerson-Kaufman; and step-granddaughter Ava Kaufman.

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EVERYDAY HEROES

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The State University of New York - Downstate Medical Center (SUNY-DMC) is seeking highly motivated individuals for the position of Academic Hospitalists in the Department of Medicine. SUNY-DMC is a part of a New York statewide health care system and is a non-for-profit institution.

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Mental

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openings and parties. The reality is there were days I was so overwhelmed I could barely get out of bed. I finally realized, however, that I couldn't hide anymore. I first mentioned my depression in 2002 in my third book, "A Plentiful Harvest: Creating Balance and Harmony Through the Seven Living Virtues." But even then, I was afraid to speak candidly about my struggle. Then God said to me, "You have to tell others about your depression, Terrie." And so, a few months ago, I decided to unload my burden, and did so on the pages of Essence magazine.

Since sharing my story, I have been blessed to receive hundreds of letters from people who gave their own testimony, from the brothas and sistahs in prison to (believe it or not) the professionals treating patients for their various illnesses, physical and emotional, who are themselves dying inside. People treat me differently, as if

there is some kind of new-found respect. Some ask if they can help, others are comfortable enough to say, "I read your story; it was/is mine." Some tip-toe and whisper the word depression.

For those who are still afraid, please know there is NO such thing as the Black Superwoman or the Invincible Black Man. Does not exist. And now, of course, we have thousands more from the Gulf Coast who are dealing with a world of hurt and suffering.

That's why this conference was so important. NAMI-NYC Metro and NAMI-Harlem work to provide support, education and advocacy for families and individuals of all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds living with mental illness.

To all of my struggling brothers and sisters, I pray that you have your burdens lifted and share in the freedom and peace I am beginning to enjoy. I can breathe a little easier not hiding behind the mask anymore.

Terrie Williams is founder and president of the Terrie Williams Agency, co-founder of the Stay Strong Foundation (a national non-profit geared to support youth), a best-selling author and renowned speaker. She is the author of "The Personal Touch: What You Really Need to Succeed in Today's Fast-paced business World" (1994, Warner Books); "A Plentiful Harvest: Creating Balance and Harmony Through the Seven Living Virtues" (2002, Warner Books); and "Stay Strong: Simple Life Lessons for Teens" (Scholastic, Inc., 2001). Email: tmwms@terriewilliams.com.

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Soldiers

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said Grishby, who has attended New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson for ten years. "I wouldn't dare say I know 500 of them."

BEING USED BY GOD

For those who feel that their path is guided by God, life is no random succession of unexplained events but a series of opportunities. Staff Sgt. R. David Kyle had been in National Guard twenty years before he was deployed to a combat zone for the first time, forcing him to leave behind his wife and nine children in the small town of Milo, Iowa. A deeply religious man, Kyle refuses to see his time in Kosovo simply as a burden to be borne but as a chance to share what God has given him.

"I firmly believe that God has allowed me to come here for a reason," said Sgt. Kyle, who is a minister at Brown's chapel in his hometown and who occasionally fills in when the base chaplain is away. "It's not a punishment, God isn't angry with me, and so he's separating me from my family—since I've been here I've had

more opportunities to witness to people about my faith and about Christ the savior than I've ever had back home."

As a stiff autumn wind blew outside, twenty soldiers gathered in the chapel on a recent Sunday afternoon for the gospel service. M-16s lay between pews as the soldiers lifted their voices in praise and testified to each other about the impact their relationship with God has had in their lives. One soldier asked for the congregation to pray for his son who is about to be sent to Iraq; another thanked Jesus for the fact that they were soon to be going home to their friends and families. All took time out of what for most was their only day off to come together in a small chapel on a hill and leave their troubles at the doorstep.

"As difficult as being separated from my family has been, and believe me it's very difficult, it's been the hardest thing I've ever had to go through," Sgt. Kyle said. "But the reason I see that God has allowed me to be here has been to share His truth with people. It has strengthened my faith and it has been very satisfying to be used by God in this way."

Billie

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why seats would have the names of Dee and Davis, Moon said, "The two of them have been with us since the beginning. They hosted the ceremonies that opened the theatre in May of 1972. They hosted Restoration's 25th anniversary, and Ruby is a board member. It's so easy to honor them for what they have done for us and Black theatre. We're always looking for ways to honor them."

The renovations will begin on June 26, when the theatre's season ends, and are scheduled to be completed by mid-October 2006.

For a theatre to last for 34 years it must have a loyal audience base, and Moon says the Billie Holiday definitely does. "Our audience comes primarily from

Brooklyn, which makes up 70-75%. The biggest members of the audience are groups; they help to spread the word, and that's made up of churches, civic organizations like The Lions, and block associations that do their fundraisers here. They book several months before we announce the season and they do it confident in what they will see. It's something that for the most part they can bring their entire family to or their pastors. It's an incredible relationship that we have built up over the years. I certainly don't take it for granted. It astounds me," Moon said.

The Billie Holiday Theatre's season begins November 4 with "Otis & Zora," a drama about a couple recovering from the loss of their child. It is written by T.R. Riggins, directed by Justin Lord, and stars Nathan Purdee, Yaa Asantewa and Carl Garrison. For tickets call 718-636-0918.

PSC

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mold or shape the marketplace, and any unnecessary transition costs are painful."

Brewer expressed concern about the digital divide in this city, with seniors being the most widely know group of consumers that are left behind by technological advances. Equally so are the poor.

"Alternative services including broadband are expensive and often unavailable in their areas," said Brewer. The city, on the other hand has been a moving target.

Askins said the BID represents nearly 1,000 businesses and properties in Harlem. She asked the PSC to be aware of the BID'S plans concerning rezoning and their goals to build an intranet community.