

## Diverse views -- Differing on candidates, churches both hope for change

*Commercial Appeal, The (Memphis, TN) - January 19, 2009*

- Author/Byline: Zack McMillin zmcmillin@commercialappeal.com
- Edition: Final
- Section: News
- Page: A1
- Correction: Correction from January 22, 2009: Anne Dunn was incorrectly identified in the caption of a photograph taken at Collierville Presbyterian Church that appeared Monday.

At the Eternal Peace Baptist Church in South Memphis, in ZIP code 38106, they are excited about the change they believe Tuesday's inauguration will bring.

"You don't have to be a rocket scientist," said deacon A.D. Hodges, "to understand the present situation dictates change. Economic. Social. In just about every area, there has been a lack."

The voting precinct Eternal Peace hosted had this electoral scoreboard: Democrat Barack Obama 1,190 votes, Republican John McCain 4. It was the strongest Obama precinct in Memphis, and that was saying something.

Take a half-hour drive to the east, and 23 miles away sits Collierville Presbyterian Church. Like Eternal Peace, it is not a large church with a massive congregation, but it is tight-knit and draws mostly from its community.

Collierville Presbyterian, however, hosted Shelby County's strongest Republican precinct, with 1,529 voters going for McCain and 317 going for Obama - an 82 percent to 17 percent spread that was not dissimilar to many Collierville precincts. Five of the county's six strongest Republican precincts were in Collierville; put another way, nowhere else in Shelby County was Obama's candidacy rejected by a greater percentage of the voting population.

Warner Davis is the thoughtful, soft-spoken pastor of Collierville Presbyterian, and he is proud of what he considers a tradition of independent thinking in his own congregation. But he said the election did trigger many conversations with church members with deep concerns over the possibility that Obama would be elected.

"This is a predominantly Republican community, so when you hear that Sen. Obama is the most liberal senator in Washington, when you tie him to (pastor) Jeremiah Wright and when you tag him with being socialist, then I think that provokes a lot of concern and some fear from people," Davis said. "There were these words that are pretty powerful, and they elicited some emotions."

Davis said he listened more than anything else and was careful not to take sides, and he is quick to point out that Collierville Presbyterian's congregation might have had a greater percentage of Obama voters than the precinct itself.

Since the election and the dying down of election rancor, however, he has sensed a softening toward Obama, both among those in his church and in the larger Collierville community.

Buddy Rowe is a former Collierville alderman and a member of a different congregation, Collierville's First Baptist Church. He puts it like this: "I guess you are going to have people with sour grapes who will never change, but I wish Obama the best. I pray that he does a great job and our country recovers. You've got to have people working together."

At Eternal Peace, the only thing they have to fear is the prospect that the new president might not bring enough change.

Census figures show that the area surrounding Eternal Peace has been feeling negative socioeconomic pressures since long before the financial meltdown. More than 35 percent of households were below the poverty line before George Bush's presidency, and those numbers have risen throughout the city of Memphis in the eight years since.

"People in this area, we are touched by every aspect of what's going on," Hodges said. "If there is a fear of anything, it's the fear that things stay the current course. That's what scares me."

Conditions are very different in Collierville's 38017 ZIP code. Only 3.3 percent were below the poverty line, and the median household income of \$79,259 is some \$60,000 more than in 38106, Eternal Peace's ZIP code.

"The No. 1 reason I think you find way more people in Collierville who are conservatives rather than liberals has more to do with success in life and the decisions they've made," said Rowe, the member of the Baptist church. "We don't have a great number of people in Collierville dependent on welfare and the government to help them."

At Eternal Peace, there is a strong feeling that it is not so much that the government isn't helping, but it has made it even harder for working people by abandoning the social contract. Verronda Johnson, a third-grade teacher at LaRose Elementary and a member of

Eternal Peace most of her life, points at the No Child Left Behind Act as an example.

The government instituted higher standards - which she supports - but did not provide the resources local schools need, she said.

"I know that Obama is just an individual, and I do not expect him to have a magic wand and say bam-bam-bam and fix it," Johnson said. "It's a process, but I have confidence he will put things into the proper perspective and follow through on it."

Those in Collierville who supported McCain and those in South Memphis who supported Obama do share this in common - both congregations are praying that Obama has what it takes to become the president the country needs.

"I've told people I hope he is the best president in the last 30 years," says Wright Cox, president of Collierville-based Bank Tennessee.

Pastor Maurice Hunt of Eternal Peace goes to another realm when discussing his own hopes for the future.

"Our hope goes not toward what any man, president, mayor or whatever can do," Hunt says. "It is what God does through the man or through the process. It is our hope that God will work through this administration to bring restoration."

Cox, the banker with a strong sense of the mood in Collierville, references one of conservative Republicans' heroes when discussing his hopes for an Obama presidency.

"President Reagan could stand in front of a group and just make everybody feel better about the country," Cox said. "If President Obama can do that and get people feeling good about where they are and where they are going, that can help the country as much as anything."

"So I think he can do an awful lot, in just that one day."

- Zack McMillin: 529-2564

-----  
"This is a predominantly Republican community, so when you hear that Sen. Obama is the most liberal senator in Washington, when you tie him to (pastor) Jeremiah Wright and when you tag him with being socialist, then I think that provokes a lot of concern and some fear from people."

Warner Davis

pastor of Collierville Presbyterian Church

-----  
Watch for our special edition

We'll roll out a special 18-page commemorative section Wednesday on the historic inauguration of Barack Obama as the nation's 44th president.

Copies will be available through home delivery, but this edition will not be sold in newspaper racks. It will be available at hundreds of area retail locations and at our offices in Millington, Bartlett, Germantown, DeSoto and Downtown at 495 Union.

Visit [commercialappeal.com/storelocations](http://commercialappeal.com/storelocations) to find the retail location nearest you. For reprints of Wednesday's edition or to order merchandise featuring the image of Wednesday's front page, go to [commercialappeal.com/store](http://commercialappeal.com/store).

Inside today's newspaper: Reports from staffers Wendi C. Thomas, Bartholomew Sullivan, Cathryn Stout and more.

On Tuesday: Presidential information and activities designed especially for children.

-----  
On the web

Complete inauguration coverage - from Washington and Memphis - as it happens. Visit [commercialappeal.com/inauguration](http://commercialappeal.com/inauguration) for staff reports, AppealTV features, streaming video, photos and Tweets.

• Caption: Photos Jim Weber/The Commercial Appeal and Brandon Dill/Special to The Commercial Appeal Eternal Peace Baptist Church usher Alvin Taylor and other members of the church worship during Sunday services earlier this month. The church hosted the voting precinct where President-elect Barack Obama got his best turnout in Memphis. Collierville Presbyterian members Karen Wimpee (center) and Ginny Claar (right) welcome back Anne Gunn, returning after an accident, earlier this month. The church hosted Shelby County's strongest Republican precinct.

• **Memo: Presidential inauguration: Restoration**

• *Index terms: us president inauguration religion church memphis reaction*

• *Record: 125D433AEDFFE4E8*

• *Copyright: Copyright (c) 2009 The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, TN*