

Houston's Power Broker

He is a confidant of President Bush and the leader of the nation's largest Methodist congregation. But Kirbyjon Caldwell says his vision is to build God's kingdom in his city.

It's 10 a.m., and the Power Center at Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston is abuzz with activity. Churchgoers are filing into the 800-seat ballroom for the second of four Sunday services. Within a half-hour, empty seats will be hard to find.

A third Sunday morning service is being held simultaneously in the church's main sanctuary to accommodate the ministry's 15,000-member congregation—the largest in the United Methodist Church (UMC).

This meeting in the Power Center, as the vast multipurpose facility is known, is

relaxed. A male chorus leads worship before the lanky pastor, dressed casually in slacks and a polo shirt, mounts the platform.

This is the tongue-talking Methodist who has been getting so much attention these days. Described as a friend of the president, the Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell, 48, was one of the few African American pastors to openly support a Republican candidate in the 2000 election. He gave the benediction at President Bush's inauguration and prayed during the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Now he's being called Bush's prayer partner, though Caldwell describes himself as "one of the people who prays with the president." Being in cahoots with a commander in chief is new for this native Houstonian, and he won't reveal the contents of their conversations. But he acknowledges that he accompanied Bush on his first visit to the site of the World

Trade Center—a disaster area “seven times worse than it looks on TV.”

“It looked like it could have been hell on earth,” he adds.

Though he stands close enough to Bush to offer him counsel, Caldwell today is intent on reminding his congregation that God hasn’t changed, even though America has. Drawing his sermon from Acts 3:11-26, a passage discussing a lame man healed at the gate Beautiful, Caldwell is part father and part teacher. He comforts the anxious, while instructing the church to exercise faith in the face of fear.

“You want to get to the point where you expect God to perform miracles,” he tells the crowd. “When you get to that point, you begin to pray with more confidence. You begin to command things that are not as though they were.

“They might be laying folk off all around you, but you stand firmly on God’s Word and say: ‘If I should get laid off, I’m gonna find another job. God is not through with me yet. I will not be a statistic.’”

The crowd is beginning to send him some shouts and amens. “I’m going to speak to some fear that’s in this house, too,” he continues. “Anthrax will not come to your house. Chemical, biological warfare shall not come to your house.

“You are under the hedge of the protection of the Lord God almighty. He protects His people in Jesus’ name. Get to the point where it’s Word over the world, Christ over culture and power over practicality.

“Let me break that down.”

Now he has reached the crux of his sermon, and he’s ready to drive his point home.

“[Swiss theologian] Karl Barth said every day you wake up you should have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the

other hand so that you can be informed about what's happening in the world and pray accordingly. But you don't let what's happening in the world impact what's happening in the Word. You let what's happening in the Word impact what's happening in the world."

The crowd is now flatly on its feet.

"You see, when you let the world overcome the Word, then it'll pulverize your faith. Word over world, Christ over over practicality.

"You've got to speak the Word. You've got to command the Word. You've got to expect the Word. You've got to stand on the Word. You must stand up for the Word and demand that God's power overcome the practicality."

Committed to Community

This message was part of a series on the book of Acts; the passage was simply next in line. Observers say Caldwell's ability to connect the dots between God's Word and his congregation's circumstances has been key to his success.

"[Caldwell] has a lot of leadership gifts," says Bishop Alfred Norris of the UMC's Texas Annual Conference. "He's well-educated, and he's a great motivator. He has a way of connecting with people. They think, I feel, that he's in tune with where their lives are."

Long before his association with President Bush hit the national news, Caldwell was making headlines for his innovative approach to economic development in the predominantly black southwest Houston community where Windsor Village is housed.

A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Wharton business school and a former Wall Street investment banker, Caldwell opened the Power Center in 1995. The 104,000-

square-foot renovated Kmart building houses a private school, branches of the University of Texas-Hermann Hospital and the Chase Bank of Texas, a Houston Community College business technology school, private business suites, and an office of the Women-Infants-Children's program, among other services. With 276 employees, the Power Center generates \$14.4 million annually and is a leading employer of African Americans in Houston.

In 1997, Newsweek named Caldwell one of the 100 people to watch in the new millennium, and he was featured on NBC Nightly News and in U.S. News & World Report and The Wall Street Journal. His book *The Gospel of Good Success* (Simon & Schuster) outlines his strategy for seeing wholeness in every area of a person's life and has become a best seller.

His vision for what he calls "community salvation" also led to the development of Corinthian Pointe, a 234-acre residential area that will include 454 single-family homes, a 24-hour prayer center, a retirement facility, fitness center, YMCA and catfish ponds. Phase One opened in July 2000 with 129 homes. The remaining construction will be ongoing through 2004, with plans to build a new sanctuary and family-life center. In April, the ministry will open a 351-resident drug treatment facility for women, children and toddlers.

Though many observers attribute the church's success to his business acumen, Caldwell winces at the claim.

"No. 1, if the Wharton MBA were making the kind of differences some folk would like to say it did, then we'd be birthing private enterprises, not nonprofit ventures," he says. "No. 2, there are a number of pastors in America who did not even go to college who have great visions for the community.

"While I would not say the MBA has not helped me at least be comfortable with the nomenclature... and all of that, what has really made the difference is my experience in Fifth Ward, not

my experience at Wharton.”

Fifth Ward is the Houston community where Caldwell grew up, exposed to “all kinds of interesting people.” His father owned a clothing store, his mother was a home-economics teacher, R&B singer Tina Turner was a family friend, and pimps and prostitutes were his neighbors.

“I was sensitive to my socioeconomic environment very early on,” he says. “As I grew in Christianity and subsequently became a pastor, my passion for the community came with me. I didn’t leave it at the doorstep.”

He notes that the Old Testament prophets frequently spoke about healing the community of Israel, not just individuals within it. And in Acts, the early church sold their possessions to ensure that everyone’s needs were met.

“The Western culture has divorced us from the concept of community,” Caldwell says, “and [we have become] very narcissistic and individualistic.”

He says that just as individuals have souls literally, communities have souls figuratively, citing Ezekiel 37 as an example of community revitalization. “It wasn’t an individual; it was an army of people who came to life. In the Old Testament it was understood that love for the individual meant justice in the society.”

For Caldwell, saving the soul of Houston meant providing not only jobs and homes, but also education. Almost from the time Caldwell became pastor of Windsor Village in 1982, the church has provided a class or ministry for everything imaginable. Today there are more than 100, including ministries dedicated to health and welfare, cocaine deliverance, real estate, legal issues, intercession, and people living with AIDS.

Praying the Price

In almost 20 years, the church has grown from 25 members to 15,000. Although Caldwell says the church doesn't focus on numbers, he finds it ironic that the largest church in the UMC is predominantly African American, while the denomination is mostly white. Windsor Village also is one of a growing number of Methodist churches embracing the move of the Holy Spirit—something that for Caldwell intensified when he married Suzette Turner Caldwell in 1991.

An environmental engineer, Suzette was raised in a devout Pentecostal home with her sister, former Miss America Debbye Turner. Her mother, the late Gussie L. Turner, was an evangelist familiar with the miraculous. Deaf ears opened, and legs grew at her meetings. Though she says she could find no fault in Caldwell as a husband, Suzette describes the first four years of their marriage as “hell,” as the two worked through their theological differences.

Kirbyjon says he was always open to charismatic teachings. He had invited Suzette's mother, who later introduced the two, to speak at his church, though he didn't know miracles accompanied her ministry.

He says Gussie Turner prayed his own mother back to life after she had been clinically dead for 90 minutes. Still, he says his embracing of the Holy Spirit was not a Damascus Road experience.

“I think, as Ecclesiastes says, there's a time for everything, and we've just kind of come into our own, in the fullness of time, as ordained by God,” he says.

The church too embraced the move of the Holy Spirit slowly as Suzette taught about prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. Suzette developed a systematic curriculum as head of the Kingdom Builders' Prayer Institute to train people how to pray. She says the church either prays God's Word, or they pray in tongues.

“Everything we pray about, we search the Scriptures and find the Scriptures that give us direction or verify what we’re praying, and then we pray those Scriptures over that situation.”

She says it took about three years to train the congregation to pray verses with ease. The second part, teaching the congregation about praying in tongues, was more difficult.

“Windsor, as a ‘t speak in tongues,” she says. “We spent a lot of time teaching who the Holy Spirit is. And as part of doing that, we taught them about tongues. We didn’t emphasize tongues, we put the emphasis on the Holy Spirit and included speaking in tongues with that.”

To ensure that everyone is in agreement, the ministry writes prayer petitions, which are read aloud in unison during corporate prayer.

“We write prayers based on Scripture, so everybody is in one accord, thinking the same thing, saying the same thing,” Suzette says. “And we command things to come into being. We seek the Holy Spirit about what the plan is...[then] we command those things on the plan to become earthly realities.”

Though the Power Center and Corinthian Pointe were birthed after the Caldwells married, Kirbyjon says the proof of the ministry’s charismatic bent is not in its community development initiatives. “It’s not that we’ve done it that’s evidence of embracing the Holy Spirit; a lot of churches do that. It’s how we did it, the methodology.”

He says when the Power Center project was at a standstill, the church held a prayer vigil on the property at 7 a.m. “We formed a human prayer of 700-plus people. We literally prayed and walked and sang songs and shouted, and shortly after that we got the breakthrough.”

On another occasion, developers planned to build a motel

behind the church's Christian school, a scenario that would have put strangers close by the children. "We prayed over that once a week," he says, "and the guy lost his permit."

United Methodist renewal leader Terry Teykl, who worked with the church to help develop its prayer center, says Windsor Village is prospering because it made an investment of prayer.

"They have a strong commitment to prayer, and the church is seeing a strong move because of their willingness to 'pray the price,'" Teykl says.

Kirbyjon Caldwell says there are now more people than ever embracing the Holy Spirit in the UMC—a trend he sees as a return to the heart of John Wesley's message.

"Interestingly, when the Methodist movement began in this country, John Wesley was very much open to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit," Caldwell says. "David Lowes Watson, who's a well-known scholar within the Methodist you cannot know the Wesleyan tradition without knowing the Holy Spirit. So we've really deviated from that. And really and truly, what Suzette has—the fire that Suzette has put under us—is very representative of the Wesleyan tradition, contrary to popular opinion."

Expectations and Affiliations

If Caldwell had his way, the future of black America would be as bright as a neon sign. He admits that it may sound ridiculous to some, but he hopes that one day all African Americans will be emotionally whole, owning their own homes, rearing their children.

"No matter how dismal or demonic the current statistics may be in black America or America in general, it's the role of the church to cast God's preferred future for this community," Caldwell says, "and make sure folk have what they need to accomplish that vision—be it faith, hope, grace, etc. If we

don't plant the seed 't water the seed, if we don't fertilize the ground, if we don't encourage the growth of the vision, then who's going to do it?"

Despite his passion to empower people, particularly African Americans, Caldwell has been criticized for his support of Bush. Some African Americans argue that Republican ideology works against the empowerment of black people, and 90 percent of blacks supported Al Gore in the 2000 election.

Ironically, it was Caldwell's economic development strategy that first got Bush's attention, a model that became one of the factors motivating him to champion faith-based initiatives. And it was the marked increase in minority business loans during Bush's tenure as Texas governor that caught Caldwell's eye. He and his wife say they respect Bush—"And we like him," they add.

Traditionally, black pastors have been voices in the African American community that champion the cause of the poor and oppressed while overseeing the spiritual and social well-being of their congregations. Some African Americans have questioned whether Caldwell, whose church is considered affluent, would maintain that posture with Bush. Though he is not the first African American pastor to befriend a president, Caldwell is the first to keep such close and visible company with a Republican president.

"I think he is in a rare, rare position of influence," says Robert Franklin, president of the historically black Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. "What's not clear is whether he can provide prophetic challenge to policies Bush articulates, whether he can say no to the president and [promote]...God's agenda, which gives priority to the poor and oppressed."

Despite his politics, Howard Jefferson, president of the Houston NAACP and a former member of Windsor Village, says

Caldwell is a force to be reckoned with in the city.

“Rev. Caldwell has a right to choose his affiliation,” Jefferson says. “If he doesn’t tell me not to associate with the Democrats, I won’t tell him not to associate with the Republicans.”

Tucked away in a conference room at the Power Center, Caldwell throws up his hands. He knows he can’t please everyone and chooses to follow his convictions. He’ll continue to counsel his friend the president, and the church has written prayer petitions for the nation and the commander in chief. Caldwell says he has no political aspirations.

“This is it,” he says.

“He’s serious too, thank the Lord,” Suzette interjects.

“I want to be a good husband to my wife, a father to my children [ages 4, 2 and 8 months].”

“He’s very good at that.”

“My wife on the other hand, she’ll be hitting the road doing speaking engagements and convocations and workshops and revivals and stuff,” he says in a good-natured, laid-back way. “I’m going to stay home and keep the kids, play golf. That’s my calling right now.”

Adrienne S. Gaines is an associate editor of Charisma and Ministries Today magazines. She interviewed Kirbyjon and Suzette Caldwell in Houston in October.

The Gospel of Good Success

Kirbyjon Caldwell preaches a message that fuses faith with works to bring spiritual, financial and social change.

The Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell's strategy for economic development has won him acclaim in Houston and beyond, with national media reports praising his innovation. But it's his message of holistic salvation and not merely his business savvy that buffers Windsor Village United Methodist Church's commitment to building God's kingdom in their city.

Making Joshua 1:8 his central text, Caldwell preaches a gospel of good success, that God wants His children to be whole in every area of their lives—spiritually, emotionally, financially. His book, *The Gospel of Good Success*, provides a road map for the journey and has been praised by Christians and non-Christians alike. It offers a practical guide to successful living, and will be converted into a video series by the United Methodist Church.

Caldwell says the quest begins with identifying your calling, or the "why" of your birth. Vocational tests and evaluations aside, he says everyone must answer two central questions: Who are you, and what were you born to become? "You have to know your mission before you can accomplish it," he writes. "You have to know your dream before you can achieve it."

Caldwell teaches that when a person aligns what they truly enjoy with God's plan for their lives, then "the alignment of mind, body, and soul—or Calling—will occur." But he notes that for many, fulfilling that calling requires that they rebound from past hurts and mistakes. He calls this process "staging a comeback" and devotes a chapter to the theme.

Staging a comeback involves acknowledging where you are, recognizing the pain experienced over lost faith or self-doubt, and learning to forgive and receive healing. But ultimately the process requires that a person realign his will with God's. When a person has done that, then he or she is ready to begin the faith walk.

The first step is the hardest, he says, but God brings the right people alongside as you walk. He encourages people to declare their vision, or give it a name, and to create receptacles to hold the vision when it manifests. This may include getting an education, developing a nonprofit corporation, or finding psychological or emotional stability.

Caldwell notes that faith-walkers must have the “audacity” to put God’s Word into action and keep the vision ever before them. Actually walking requires that believers trust that God has their backs. Their prayers and praise will feed that faith.

But no matter how strong a person’s faith, he says, the devil will still rear his ugly head, accusing, tempting and attacking the mind. Seeing good success requires that Christians learn how to “whup” the devil—a battle that starts in the mind. Gaining the victory over Satan is outlined in Ephesians 6, Paul’s teaching on the armor of God. But whuppin’ the devil—distinctly different from whipping the devil, which may have him coming back for more—also includes killing some giants.

“If the devil influences the thoughts, habits and temptations that steer us wrong or hold us back—shame, embarrassment, self-destruction—Giants are all the tangible ‘things’ that we fail to overcome because we think we can’t.”

These giants often represent deeper issues—fear, depression, pain, guilt, shame—that must also be destroyed. God is always more powerful than the giant, Caldwell writes, so Christians must not be intimidated, even if there is a legion of Goliaths.

One of the biggest giants in our culture, Caldwell writes, is the love of money. Yet he says God wants His children financially blessed. “Whether I deserve the blessings is beside the point: blessings are based on God’s grace, not on

merit. Grace, by definition, cannot be earned.”

The key is learning to create wealth God’s way and not falling in love with material things. Staying true to his business roots, Caldwell has a formula: faith + good stewardship + giving = abundance. God can breathe life into dry bones—performing miracles in a person’s finances—but all believers have a responsibility to see God as their source, to conquer debt and bad spending habits, and to give God a tenth of their money, time and talents, he says.

Caldwell goes on to discuss healthy relationships, which he says are formed after a person has developed a relationship with God, then himself, then with the other person. God-blessed relationships will meet an individual’s needs, cause both partners to grow and won’t require a person to constantly ask God for forgiveness.

“God-blessed relationships are very simple, very clean partnerships; the partners love each other, meet each other’s needs, grow in their love, and act in accordance with God’s will. Dysfunctional relationships, in contrast, are complicated with arguments and constantly clouded in confusion.”

All in all, wholeness boils down to desire. Nothing will change if a person doesn’t want to be made whole.

“Becoming whole is a process,” Caldwell states. “Each step offers deliverance, growth and integrity. There are no shortcuts or easy exits. The very essence of wholeness is ‘going all the way.’ Are you prepared for the journey? Do you want to be made whole?”

Prayers to Heal a Nation

Suzette Caldwell developed a specific prayer strategy after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

For Windsor Village United Methodist Church, strategic intercession has been a key tool in bringing wholeness to their community. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the ministry broadened its focus to include prayer for the president and the nation, holding prayer meetings on Saturdays from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. Suzette Caldwell and her prayer ministry team developed the following list of prayer petitions in the weeks after September 11.

- * That the families and friends of the victims would receive peace of mind, acceptance and healing, according to Isaiah 26:1-4 and 1 Peter 5:5-11.

- * That the survivors of the tragedy would overcome post-traumatic stress disorder and regain emotional equilibrium, according to Isaiah 40:27-31 and Romans 8:31-39.

- * That the economy and stock market would rebound and become more buoyant, and that consumers would experience no psychological fear, according to Psalm 1:1-6, Psalm 37:23-29 and 1 John 4:17-19.

- * That President Bush and his administration would hear and implement God's primary will in response to this tragedy, according to Psalm 27:1-14, Psalm 37:1-29 and Joshua 1:5-9.

- * That the media would not function under a spirit of sensationalism, but would offer objective reporting with clarity, according to Proverbs 12:17-22 and Proverbs 16:16-20.

- * That New York Gov. George Pataki and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg would provide the survivors' families and New York residents with the appropriate civic and social infrastructure, according to Proverbs 21:1-8 and 2 Corinthians 9:8-15.

- * That the Pentagon workers and employees of companies located in lower Manhattan would process the tragedy, deal with the trauma and go forward, according to Psalm 147:1-10 and Isaiah

43:1-5.

* That the terrorists would cease from doing evil, according to 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and Isaiah 1:16-17.

* That the emergency rescue, fire department and police personnel would have the emotional stamina and physical strength to perform their tasks, according to Psalm 27:6-14 and Psalm 121.

* That companies and business sectors adversely impacted by the tragedy would receive the appropriate financial assistance and manage the assets awesomely, according to Psalm 46:1-7 and Psalm 147:1-11.

* That the city of Houston and the surrounding area would experience safety, security and surety, according to Psalm 146:1-10 and Isaiah 32:16-20.

* That military personnel who are going to war would be effective, efficient and safe, according to Deuteronomy 20:1-4 and Isaiah 26:12-15.

* That innocent American Arabs and Muslims would receive fair and just treatment in the American social order, according to Amos 5:21-24 and John 13:34-36.

* That people injured during the attacks would experience healing, recovery and restoration, according to 3 John 2, Psalm 103:1-5 and Mark 11:23-24.

* That the nation would repent, according to 2 Timothy 3:1-7, 2 Peter 3:9, Joel 2:12-13, Amos 5:14-15 and 2 Chronicles 7:14-16.

* That all would be saved, according to John 3:16-17, Luke 19:9 and Romans 10:10.