

# Virginia Pastor Takes Bold Stand Against Divorce, Racism in Richmond

**Gerald O. Glenn, once a street gangster, says he will not stand by and watch while people in his community suffer**

When Richmond, Va., pastor Gerald O. Glenn noticed the high divorce rate among couples in his church, he boldly declared a moratorium on weddings. And when local elected officials voted to “glorify Confederate history,” he called for a community boycott.

Defending others isn’t unusual for this one-time “gangster”-turned-police-officer-turned-preacher.

“I just can’t stand by and watch people suffer,” says Glenn, who pastors the city’s 2,000-member New Deliverance Evangelistic Church (NDEC). “It doesn’t matter if it’s racism that’s hurting them or cocaine. It’s in me to help.”

His strong ministry focus on healthy marriages started in part because he became weary of watching couples he knew getting divorced.

“I got tired of marrying couples in my church, and 90 days to a year later, they were divorced,” said Glenn, who was once affiliated with the Church of God in Christ. Instead, before he performs ceremonies, Glenn and his wife, Marcietia, take couples through extensive marriage sessions that include teaching on finances, communication and intimacy.

"We preach Jesus and holiness, and that alone changes peoples' lives," he says. His 14 years of pastoral experience has taught Glenn that his approach to the gospel must be different. "My method in presenting the message of Jesus must be relevant."

His position naturally rubs off on his congregation. When First Monumental Faith Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., burned last year due to an electrical fire, NDEC members traveled 28 hours roundtrip on two 50-passenger buses to offer \$5,000 and other support to the church.

NDEC, dubbed a "gentle giant" by the community, is noted for its compassion toward hurting people and the lost. Some members come from troubled backgrounds and have nowhere else to turn. At NDEC they find help through more than a dozen church ministries.

The church partners with the city of Richmond in assisting welfare mothers with employment, clothing and mentoring. "These people have real problems, and we offer them real solutions," Marcietia Glenn said.

Helping people turn their lives around comes naturally for Glenn, 48. He grew up in Portsmouth, Va.'s, toughest projects, and he says his ministry attracts hard-core ex-offenders because he used to be a "thug."

Through the NDEC prison ministry, ex-offenders find assistance with job placement, and the ministry hopes to one day offer housing. The goal of many of the programs at the church is to help people become viable and responsible members of society through Christ-centered teaching and educational resources.

Glenn said that, as a leader, he has an obligation to be active in the lives of people in the church, as well as in the community, where last year he called for a citywide boycott of local Chesterfield County malls and area restaurants in response to a planned controversial historical observance.

When then-Gov. Jim Gilmore designated more than a year ago that April 2001 would be Confederate History and Heritage month, Glenn and his congregation called on area churches and civic organizations to protest the monthlong observance.

Some insisted the April celebration was a way to “even the score with Black History Month,” but most saw its commemoration of both the enslavement of black people and lynchings as a slap in the face to black and white residents. Confederate supporters told the Richmond Free Press the issue wasn’t about race.

“We are not promoting slavery,” Henry Kidd, of the Virginia Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, told the newspaper. “All of us agree 100 percent that slavery was an abomination.”

Kidd stunned the public in August when he came to Glenn’s church seeking reconciliation for their past division. Glenn cried, and the two embraced as church members cheered. Glenn and Kidd now work together on the Heritage Month to foster unity in the city.

“We know that ultimately our fight is not against flesh and blood,” Glenn said. “We are fighting for souls to come to Christ. That’s our purpose for being in this community.

**-Valerie G. Lowe**