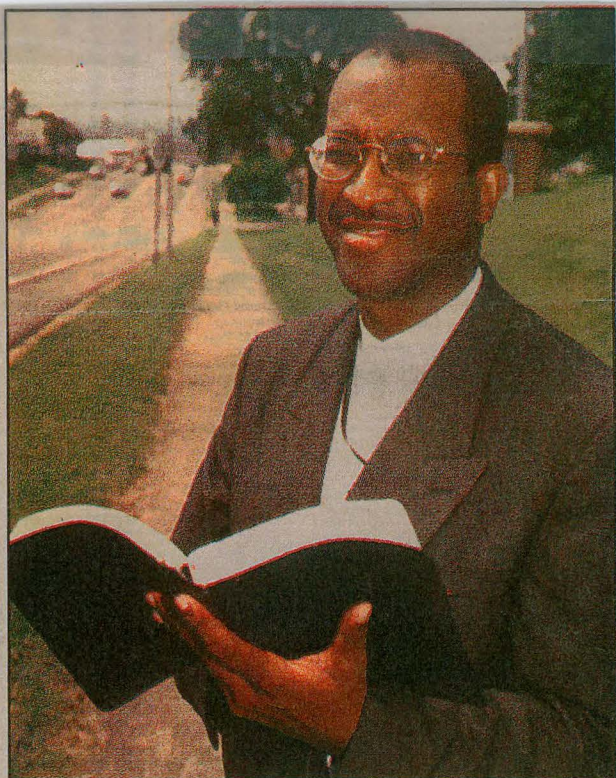


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Times-News photo — David Grace

Pastor Ronnie Collins hopes Joshua Generation is able to help young people who are in trouble with the law.

Pastor offers youth ministry program as jail alternative

By CHRISTOPHER SCHNAARS
Times-News Staff Writer

Tylee Henry was in trouble.

Only nine days after legally becoming an adult, Henry was arrested last month and charged with inciting a riot, criminal impersonation and disorderly conduct. He was convicted about two weeks later.

Officers said Henry shouted obscenities at police, suggested they wear vests, made lewd comments about their wives, and encouraged a group of black teen-agers to fight police because the officers were outnumbered. The

police had arrived to stop a fight between about 30 black and white teens that was about to get under way.

Henry, a promising athlete at Volunteer High School, was a likely candidate for an athletic scholarship, an opportunity that would have been lost had he been sentenced to jail.

But instead of giving him jail time, General Sessions Judge Duane Snodgrass gave Henry a curfew, ordered him to stay in school, and allowed him to stay out of jail by participating in Joshua Generation, a local youth ministry program.

Now Henry is attending

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Pastor offers alternative

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church and Bible school, has participated in street ministries in the Riverview section of Kingsport, and is on a path to become a church deacon, says Ronnie Collins, the pastor of Spirit and Truth Full Gospel Baptist Church, which oversees Joshua Generation.

The church's congregation is multi-denominational and holds worship services in the Kingsport Renaissance Center.

Collins wants the courts to make the program a regular alternative to jail for young, first-time offenders who commit nonviolent crimes.

"We're trying to get people before they get into trouble, and if they already are, we'll say, 'We're here to help you,'" Collins said.

Snodgrass said Central Appalachian Probation Services is reviewing the program for possible future referrals, and he said he allowed Henry to participate in the program to give the young man another chance.

"It's just a hope that something good could happen," Snodgrass said.

Collins said the program focuses on young African-American males because they make up a large segment of the prison population and because young black men — many from single-parent homes and without positive role models — often lack self-esteem and the belief they can succeed.

"We went to bat for Tylee. ... But any family that has a son or daughter that is on the verge of getting in trouble with the law or has done something ... we want them to contact our ministry program," Collins said. "We're not just making this for blacks."