Ethan Temple Pastor Named to Allegheny West Conference Presidency

The Allegheny West Conference Executive Committee selected William Cox on Sunday to serve as president. He replaces Fredrick Russell who accepted a call to serve as senior pastor of the Berean church in Atlanta.

Cox is a graduate of Oakwood University (Ala.), and received a Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Education from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (La.). He holds a Doctor of Ministry from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. His 32 years of pastoral ministry have been dedicated to populating the kingdom of God. He spent the past 13 years of his ministry in Allegheny West Conference and currently pastors the Ethan Temple congregation in Dayton.

Cox (left), pictured with Dave Weigley, Columbia Union president, explained to the committee why he believes God led in this decision: “When you do what God has asked you to do, He will make Himself personally responsible for your success.”—Story and photo by Bryant Taylor
Former Potomac Conference President Passes Away

Herb Broeckel, who retired as president of the Potomac Conference in 2002, passed away last Thursday. He made his home near Smith Mountain Lake in Huddleston, Va. He and his wife, Jeannie, served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 52 years. Thirty-five of those years were spent in the Potomac Conference.

“Herb served Potomac Conference in many different capacities, from pastor to president, and in each one made a significant contribution to God’s kingdom,” Bill Miller, current Potomac president, said. “What a blessing and inspiration he was to me! He will be missed.”

Over the years, Broeckel also served the conference as a pastor and as director of the Youth, Religious Liberty and Communication departments. He later became the conference’s executive secretary. Broeckel was also president of the Mountain View and the Central California conferences. For the last several years, he pastored the Farmville (Va.) district.— Story by Potomac Conference Staff

City of Cleveland, Adventist Peers Recognize Walk of Faith

Ohio Conference’s Walk of Faith Community Center just received another award for its good works. Last Thursday the City of Cleveland and the First District Police/Community Relations Committee presented Kevin Kuehmichel, who pastors the Walk of Faith Fellowship, with their community award. According to Tammy L. Hanna, First District representative, the award is given to citizens who contribute to
“making our city a better place to live.” Pictured are Frank G. Jackson, mayor of Cleveland, and Michael McGrath, Cleveland’s chief of police, flanking Kuehmichel.

The community center was also recognized at the Ohio Conference’s seventh annual National Conference on Innovation, held in Dayton last year. During the conference, Fred Manchur, president and CEO of Kettering Adventist Healthcare, presented Kuehmichel with its $3,000 Innovation of the Year Award. The award will benefit the center’s food bank.— Story by Visitor Staff; Photos by Mar de Oliveira

READ MORE

Academy Students Participate in Brain Games

Several Columbia Union academy students recently travelled to Southwestern Adventist University (SWAU) in Keene, Texas, to participate in Brain Games, which was themed “Seige: Engines of War.” The SWAU Math and History departments collaborated to have students from 18 schools build and experience war apparatus from three different eras: the Middle Ages, World War II and the Cold War. Students from Spencerville Adventist Academy (SAA) in Spencerville, Md., Shenandoah Valley Academy (SVA) in New Market, Va., and Highland Adventist School (HAS) in Elkins, W.Va., competed by creating catapults, slings, trebuchets and/or rockets.

SVA students won first place in the “mathletics” competition, which included a $2,000 college scholarship per student to SWAU and a $1,000 prize to SVA’s Math and Science Department. The HAS team (pictured) came in first in the rocket-launching contest.

“I never thought applying math to real-life situations could be so fun!” exclaimed Brandon Injety, an SAA senior.
Honesdale Church Burns Mortgage

The Honesdale (Pa.) church, the second Arise and Build church in the Pennsylvania Conference, recently paid off their mortgage and held a Mortgage Burning Party to celebrate God’s blessings. Will Peterson, the conference’s vice president for Mission and Administration, who has largely spearheaded the Arise and Build program, spoke and congratulated the Honesdale church.

Pastor Thomas Cusack shared a slide presentation of the raising up of the building and the many people who helped. Ed Howell, representing the mayor's office, congratulated the church and expressed his appreciation for their witness and work in the community. Jean Cusack sang. The elders of the church burned the mortgage, and the church family celebrated with a fellowship meal.—Thomas Cusack/MiPaConference News

Allegheny East Car Salesman Scores Trade-in of a Lifetime

Everyone knows the economy is at best limping along, so why would someone with his career on the rise, walk away from a job, to honor a church doctrine he abandoned several years ago? That’s the choice that Adrian Mundle, a used car sales manager with more than 18 years of experience, faced when he became a baptized member of the Allegheny East Conference Metropolitan church in Hyattsville, Md. Mundle was one of 113 people who took a stand for Christ after attending the church’s two-week “Lifted” evangelism series.

The decision he had to make in September was not an easy one. He had a secure position and the respect of his bosses. But Mundle knew all that would be in jeopardy the moment he requested Saturdays off. Click here to read his testimony.—Story by Jermey N. A. Matthews; Photo by Claudette
Se invita a los adventistas a unirse en oración

Los líderes en cada nivel de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día están instando a la feligresía mundial a comenzar el 2012 con oración. La División Norteamericana publicó un calendario de oración que señala una o dos Asociaciones por las cuales orar cada semana durante el 2012 (vea el recuadro). “La iglesia mundial orará unida, y deseo que nosotros seamos parte ello”, dijo Dave Weigley, presidente de la Unión de Columbia. —Historia escrita por Celeste Ryan Blyden

Ohio, Pennsylvania Conferences Launch Email News

If you are a member of the Ohio or Pennsylvania conferences, then you don’t want to miss their email newsletters. Ohio Conference’s Faithpoints is a monthly e-newsletter, and the Pennsylvania Conference’s MiPaConference News is an electronic version of the conference newsletter that goes out by standard mail reach month.

Click here to sign up for the Ohio Conference’s Faithpoints. To sign up for MiPaConference News by email, visit paconference.org and enter your email address under “Join Our Email List.” The conference also tells video stories on their Vimeo page. Check it out!
Girl’s Generosity Inspires Mountain View Members

Five pennies and a gently worn coat were all Iyanna Burke could spare, when a neighbor she’d never met knocked on her door and asked for help. These small gifts were all it took to restore Elsie Mitchem’s faith in people and remind a whole network of friends about the innocent generosity of a child’s pure heart. This unique Christmas story began in the heart of Valley View Adventist Church’s Campaign for Community, an annual fund drive designed to send church members door to door, collecting donations to fund smoking cessation clinics, healthful-cooking classes, elder care, disaster response and more.

The [campaign] spans the holiday season, from Thanksgiving until Christmas, and it calls on members of the Valley View Adventist Church to seek help for their neighborhoods from the same communities that will ultimately receive the assistance.—Tammi Toler/Princeton Times

READ more on the Princeton Times website.

Union ASI Convention Slated for March

All are invited to attend the Columbia Union chapter of the Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI) convention, which will take place at Potomac Conference’s Vienna (Va.) church. The convention runs from Thursday, March 8 through Sunday, March 11. Ivor Myers (pictured), speaker/director of Power of the Lamb Ministries, will present eight seminars over the weekend; the Guild of Adventist Musicians will present gifted musicians to open the Sabbath hours on Friday evening; and Henry Wright, pastor of the Community Praise church in Alexandria, Va., will close the Sabbath with a vespers service.

For more information visit asicolumbiaunion.netasi.org or register at plusline.org.—Denise Hayden

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 21: Restoration Praise Center is hosting a Religious Liberty Day
under the theme “Religious Liberty: It’s Political and Global Impact and What it Means to You.” The featured speaker for the divine hour will be presidential appointee Orlan Johnson, chairman of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation. There will also be a panel discussion with guests Paul Monteiro, associate director, White House Office of Public Engagement; Melissa Reid, associate director, Liberty magazine; Jennifer Mason, deputy chief of staff for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management; and Michelle Chin, PhD, legislative assistant to Senator John Cornyn (R-TX). The church is located at 10411 Greenbelt Road in Lanham, Md. For more information, visit rpcsda.org.

January 29: The Pennsylvania Conference Youth and Young Adult Ministries Family Ski Trip will be held at Jack Frost Big Boulder in White Haven, Pa. The price is $48 for the snow pass, lesson and rental. The lessons are for ages 8 and over. Helmet rentals are $10 additional. Tickets must be purchased by January 16, 2012. Pre-paid ticket pick-up will be at the Jack Frost Lodge, 8 a.m.-12 noon. For more information, contact the conference’s Youth Ministries Department at (607) 374-8331, ext. 212 or at pa-youth@paconference.org.

February 2: Spencerville Adventist Academy invites all eighth graders and other high school students to attend their Academy Day from 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Visiting students will get the opportunity to meet teachers and students, hear and see the school’s touring groups perform, compete for scholarships, play against basketball teams and check out the new school. To RSVP, contact Heidi Wetmore at (301) 421-9101 or hwetmore@spencerville.org.

February 12: Crossroads Adventist Preparatory School Presents “A Healthier You: Community Symposium and Health Fair.” It runs 10 a.m. thru 4 p.m. and will feature student presentations on health, nutrition and fitness; a health trivia challenge game; information and activity booths featuring massage therapy, health screenings, medical organizations and vegetarian cooking demos; fitness classes, seminars/workshops on women’s, men’s and children’s health and more! The school is located at 3291 St John's Lane, in Ellicott City, Md. For more information, call (866) 715-7752.

February 17-19: The “Love for a Lifetime” Marriage Enrichment Retreat will be held at the Dunes Manor Hotel in Ocean City, Md. The registration fee of $299 per couple includes two nights at Dunes Manor Hotel, brunch, tea, dinner on Saturday and brunch on Sunday. For more information, e-mail MarriageEnrichment@comcast.net, or contact Mark and Peggy Lee at (301) 317-5428 or Jeff and Sandy Hartz at (443) 864-6328. The Triadelphia church and Maranatha Adventist Fellowship are among the churches sponsoring the retreat.

February 24-26: Chesapeake Conference’s high school students will want to attend the Generation Rain Spiritual Retreat at Mount Aetna Camp and Retreat Center in Hagerstown, Md. Themed “The Call,” the weekend features speakers from Insight magazine:
February 24-26, 2012: Pennsylvania Conference’s marriage retreat, “Love on the Farm” will feature Claudio and Pamela Consuegra, North American Division Family Ministries directors. It will be held at the Best Western Premier Contrl Hotel and Conference Center in Harrisburg, Pa. To register online visit, www.paconference.org, go to the Ministries page and click on Family Ministries. For more information, contact Jeanne Hartwell at jhartwell@paconference.org, or (610) 374-8331.

March 8-11: The Columbia Union chapter of the Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI) convention will feature Ivor Myers, speaker/director of Power of the Lamb Ministries; the Guild of Adventist Musicians and Henry Wright, pastor of the Community Praise Center in Alexandria, Va. The convention will be held at Potomac Conference’s Vienna (Va.) church, located at 344 Courthouse Road SW in Vienna. For more information visit www.asicolumbiaunion.netasi.org or register at www.plusline.org.

For more news and up-to-date information from the Columbia Union Conference, visit columbiaunion.org

Forward to a Friend or Subscribe

To share the Visitor News Bulletin with friends and church members across the Columbia Union, click the “Forward to a Friend” link below so all the photos and copy will appear correctly. Also, encourage them to sign up for the email at www.columbiaunion.org/emailnews. Thank you!

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Taashi Rowe, Visitor News Bulletin Editor
5427 Twin Knolls Road, Columbia, MD 21045
Email: visitor@columbiaunion.net Website: www.columbiaunion.org

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Ethan Temple Pastor Named to Allegheny West Conference Presidency

Story by Bryant Taylor
Published 1/9/2012

Allegheny West Conference Executive Committee selected William Cox on Sunday to serve as president. He replaces Fredrick Russell who accepted a call to serve as senior pastor of the Berean church in Atlanta.

Cox is a graduate of Oakwood University (Ala.), and received a Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Education from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (La.). He holds a Doctor of Ministry from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. His 32 years of pastoral ministry have been dedicated to populating the kingdom of God. He began his ministry in the Southwest Region Conference, where he spent 17 years, before moving to the Southern California Conference where he pastored the Berean church in Los Angeles. He spent the past 13 years of his ministry in Allegheny West Conference and currently pastors the Ethan Temple congregation in Dayton.

Upon acceptance of the position, Cox explained to the committee why he believes God led in this decision: “When you do what God has asked you to do, He will make Himself personally responsible for your success.”

Members are encouraged to keep Cox, his wife, LaTanya, and their family in prayer.

The next conference constituency session is scheduled for 2013.
Former Potomac Conference President Passes Away

Story by Potomac Conference Staff
Published 1/5/12

Herb Broeckel, who retired as president of the Potomac Conference in 2002, passed away this morning. He made his home near Smith Mountain Lake in Huddleston, Va. He and his wife, Jeannie, served the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 52 years. Thirty-five of those years were spent in the Potomac Conference.

“Herb served Potomac Conference in many different capacities, from pastor to president, and in each one made a significant contribution to God’s kingdom,” Bill Miller, current Potomac president, said. “What a blessing and inspiration he was to me! He will be missed.”

Before coming to the Columbia Union as president, Dave Weigley followed in Broeckel’s footstep as Potomac president. “He was a wonderful Christian leader, and was much loved for his caring approach to leading the Potomac Conference,” Weigley recalled.

Over the years, Broeckel also served the conference as a pastor and as director of the Youth, Religious Liberty and Communication departments. He later became the conference’s executive secretary. Broeckel was also president of the Mountain View and the Central California conferences. For the last several years, he pastored the Farmville (Va.) district.

Please keep his family in your prayers. Funeral service information will be posted at pcsda.org.
Kevin Kuehmichel, pastor of the Walk of Faith Fellowship receives the City of Cleveland and the First District Police/Community Relations Committee community award.

Ohio Conference’s Walk of Faith Community Center just received another award for its good works. Last Thursday the City of Cleveland and the First District Police/Community Relations Committee presented Kevin Kuehmichel, who pastors the Walk of Faith Fellowship, with their community award. According to Tammy L. Hanna, the First District representative, the award is given to citizens who contribute to “making our city a better place to live.”

The community center was also recognized at the Ohio Conference’s seventh annual National Conference on Innovation, held in Dayton last year. During the conference, Fred Manchur, president and CEO of Kettering Adventist Healthcare, presented Kuehmichel with its $3,000 Innovation of the Year Award. The award will benefit the center’s food bank. Award criteria included innovation (the uniqueness and strength of the idea), missional impact, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and aspiration and growth.

Last year the Cleveland Food Bank named community center as “Innovative Program of the Year 2011.” Click here to read more about that award.
Frank G. Jackson, mayor of Cleveland, and Michael McGrath, Cleveland’s chief of police, flank Pastor Kuehmichel.

Pictured from right to left are several of the center’s volunteers: Trish Kuehmichel, Kevin Kuehmichel, Jon Falkenstein, Lisa Falkenstein, Doreen Franklin and Gail Merda.
Everyone knows the economy is at best limping along, so why would someone with his career on the rise, walk away from a job, to honor a church doctrine he abandoned several years ago? That's the choice that Adrian Mundle, a used car sales manager with more than 18 years of experience, faced in September when he became a baptized member of the Allegheny East Conference Metropolitan church in Hyattsville, Md.

Mundle was one of 113 people who took a stand for Christ after attending the church's two-week "Lifted" evangelism series.

Originally from Jamaica, Mundle grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home. In church he watched his grandfather, father and mother preach. He was baptized at the age of nine, but shortly after moving to Maryland at age 15, Mundle says he began a habit that led him away from the church —working on Sabbaths. The decision he had to make in September was not an easy one. He had a secure position and the respect of his bosses. But Mundle knew all that would be in jeopardy the moment he requested Saturdays off. Mundle shares more about his story below:

**Question:** Prior to your baptism, what was your relationship with God like?

**Answer:** Growing up, I was active in the church, but my relationship with God wasn't something I took seriously. I was young. I figured I could get serious later. But as I grew older, and as I drifted away from God and the church, I wanted to come back so badly that I prayed for God to close doors [so I wouldn't] have to work on the Sabbath.

**Question:** So how did you discover Metro church and the “Lifted” series?

**A:** A friend who goes to Metro told me about locating the church's sermons on Praizevision.com. After listening to the messages, I knew God was answering my prayer for Him to close doors, so I told my general manager I wanted to go back to church. He tried to discourage me, but I had made up my mind. That was a Saturday. By Monday, he called me in the office and told me that things weren't working out and that they would have to let me go. I went from the owner [of the
Q: So you decided to be baptized; how does it feel to be a part of such a large response?
A: Something that big doesn’t happen without the Holy Spirit moving. It feels good to be part of something ordained by God. The only sad part was that my mother was not there. (Mundle made a spontaneous decision to be baptized on the second Sabbath of the “Lifted” crusade.)

Q: Now that you’ve rededicated your life to Christ, what’s next?
A: Since I’ve been out of a job, I’ve registered at University of Maryland to study accounting. [In church] I’ve done a few Sabbath School mission stories, I’m training with MMM [Metropolitan Media Ministries] and I’m also an usher.

But I just want to continue to learn more from the Bible. I’m praying for the help of the Holy Spirit. When I got baptized, my sister reminded me that [as a young boy] I always used to say I would preach a Revelation seminar series before I die. Now that I’m re-baptized, I’ll say that I want to preach several Revelation seminars because I don’t want to give the devil any ideas.

*Story reprinted with permission from the December 2011 Metropolitan Voice, which is a publication of the Metropolitan church.*
Bienvenido a la presencia de la Unión de Columbia de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día en el internet. Desde nuestra sede en Columbia, Md., trabajamos para avanzar y ejecutar la misión de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día en el centro de los Estados Unidos--preparar a un pueblo para el pronto regreso de Cristo.

En esta página compartimos historias emocionantes de cómo Dios está obrando en las iglesias hispano hablantes. ¡Necesitamos su ayuda en mantener actualizada esta página! Le invitamos a enviarnos sus historias y noticias en inglés y español a Visitor@columbiaunion.net.
Se invita a los adventistas en la Unión de Columbia a unirse en la oración mundial

Historia escrita por Celeste Ryan Blyden
Publicada el 4 de enero de 2012

En cada nivel de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día, los líderes están instando a la feligresía mundial a comenzar el 2012 con oración. Los líderes de la Asociación General están promoviendo una iniciativa de oración de diez días llamada: operación lluvia global, conocida en inglés como Operation Global Rain (OGR). Con sus raíces en un movimiento de oración que comenzó en California, y se extendió a mil ochocientas iglesias en el mundo, la operación lluvia global, invita a las personas, grupos e iglesias, a orar del 4 al 14 de enero por el derramamiento del Espíritu Santo. Se puede inscribir y descargar los materiales en revivalandreformation.org.

Por su parte, la División Norteamericana publicó un calendario de oración en el que señala una o dos Asociaciones por las cuales la feligresía debe orar cada semana en el 2012. “Oren por el desarrollo de un espíritu de unidad en las cincuenta y ocho Asociaciones y nueve Uniones que componen la División Norteamericana”, dijo Dan Jackson, presidente de la División. La feligresía en la División orará por la Unión de Columbia en febrero y marzo (vea la nota enmarcada en el recuadro).

Los líderes de la Unión de Columbia están apoyando ambos esfuerzos. “La iglesia mundial orará unida, y deseo que nosotros seamos parte ello”, dijo Dave Weigley, presidente de la Unión de Columbia. Lea la lista de oración en la página tres del número de enero de la revista Visitor.

Haga clic aquí para conocer el motive de oración de los líderes de la Unión

Calendario de oración de la Unión de Columbia

5 al 11 de febrero – Allegheny Este
12 al 18 de febrero – Allegheny Oeste
19 al 25 de febrero – Chesapeake y Mountain View
26 de febrero al 3 de marzo – Nueva Jersey
4 al 10 de marzo – Ohio
11 al 17 marzo – Pensilvania
18 al 24 de marzo – Asociación del Potomac

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5 pennies and a coat: Straley Avenue child inspires holiday hope with her generosity (http://ptonline.net/princeton/x1666050683/5-pennies-and-a-coat-Straley-Avenue-child-inspires-holiday-hope-with-her-generosity)

By TAMMIE TOLER  
Princeton Times (http://ptonline.net)

PRINCETON — Five pennies and a gently worn coat were all Iyanna Burke could spare, when a neighbor she'd never met knocked on her door and asked for help.

These small gifts were all it took to restore Elsie Mitchem’s faith in people and remind a whole network of friends about the innocent generosity of a child’s pure heart.

This unique Christmas story began in the heart of Valley View Adventist Church’s Campaign for Community, an annual fund drive designed to send church members door to door, collecting donations to fund smoking cessation clinics, healthful-cooking classes, elder care, disaster response and more.

“Every bit of what we raise stays in this community, and we can even use the money to help people in need make it through difficult times,” Mitchem explained Wednesday. “We can’t make any big payments or anything, but we can help with the electricity bill or the grocery bill.”

The Campaign for Christmas drive spans the holiday season, from Thanksgiving until Christmas, and it calls on members of the Valley View Adventist Church to seek help for their neighborhoods from the same communities that will ultimately receive the assistance.

“We ask friends and neighbors if they’d like to give a donation for friends and neighbors less fortunate,” Mitchem said.

So, on a very special day recently, Mitchem and her daughter were fulfilling their mission, conducting a door-to-door drive on Straley Avenue. That was when Mitchem — dressed in her trademark apron that reads “People Helping People” — knocked on a door where three children ranging from 10 to 16 years old were home at the time.

When they appeared at the door, Mitchem explained why she had knocked on their door, not truly expecting the children to be in a position to help her cause.

“This little girl, sweet as she could be, said, ‘I can. I can find you something,’” Mitchem said.

Iyanna briefly disappeared into the home, only to return momentarily with five pennies. With her giving spirit shining bright, Iyanna apologized for the meager nature of her donation.
Times haven’t been exactly easy for her family lately, but she was willing to give everything she could spare. The warm gesture touched Mitchem and left the lady used to having doors closed in her face on the brink of tears.

“I said, ‘Sweetheart, that’s all right. It doesn’t matter how much you give, as long as your heart is right when you give it,’” Mitchem said.

Just as she was assuring Iyanna that everything she had was plenty, the little girl disappeared again, announcing that she had one more thing she could contribute.

This time, she returned to the door with a lightweight jacket, declaring that she could give a coat for someone who might go cold this Christmas season.

Stunned, Mitchem at first told Iyanna that she could not possibly take a coat the little girl might need, but at the child’s insistence, she relented and pledged that she would put the coat in the hands of someone who truly needed it and would cherish it accordingly.

As she shared the story with her daughter, Mitchem said the two women succumbed to the tears that had threatened previously, unaccustomed to Iyanna’s complete willingness to give when she had little to share.

“That little girl gave everything she could find in that house to donate,” Mitchem explained.

These days, most people are less than welcoming to someone soliciting door-to-door for an unfamiliar cause. Most people are tolerant, but it’s easy for Mitchem to get discouraged when she constantly meets road blocks and irritation amid donation requests.

Iyanna’s complete contribution reminded her, “You have more of the nice people, who make up the difference for it … It just gave me a high to keep on doing this … She was so sincere, and she just wanted to share.”

Not long afterward, Mitchem continued the Campaign for Community mission, still inside the warm glow of Iyanna’s generosity. She shared the story with a friend of hers, who happened to be the librarian at the First Christian Church on Straley Avenue.

When she described the home where she had met Iyanna and her two brothers, Judy Raines realized that she knew the family who starred in the story; the children recently began attending her church, and she, too, had noticed Iyanna’s sweet spirit and her determination to make her small part of the world a better place.

As the two ladies talked, Raines pledged that she would try to round up some holiday help for Iyanna and her family, to reward her embodiment of the Christmas hope, and Mitchem decided she would ask Campaign for Community for a modest allotment as well.

After all, she reasoned, if Iyanna’s family could use some help this holiday season, it was only fair that the fund assist the little girl who was willing to give all she had to help others.

Raines, known to Iyanna as “Miss Judy,” contacted her mother, Sandra Burke, who to that point had no idea of the entire experience. She had been working the day that Mitchem met her daughter.

“It made me cry,” Burke said. “It made me feel like I’m doing something right.”
When she asked her daughter about the incident, Iyanna explained it just the way Mitchem described.

“She said, ‘Mama, I could only find five pennies, and I hope that you don’t mind that I gave them one of my jackets,’” Burke said. “She’s my sweetheart.”

Although Burke was touched by her daughter’s caring contribution to Mitchem’s efforts, she wasn’t entirely surprised that Iyanna offered everything she could.

“We call Iyanna a little mama. She’s younger than her closest brother, but she always makes sure he has everything he needs, and she looks after everybody,” Burke said.

The children chose to start attending First Christian Church on their own recently. Burke can’t attend herself, because her job as a demonstrator and sampler at the Sam’s Club in Bluefield, Va., determines how most of her weekend hours are spent, but she’s proud that her children have chosen to attend.

“It has just amazed me how everything fell into place,” she said.

Wednesday, Burke had to be in Charleston, but she called and gave Raines permission to take Iyanna on a small shopping spree just ahead of the holiday season.

She let the little girl share some of her purchases, as she explained she bought pajamas, slippers and a couple of games, but she also let her keep some of her purchases to herself.

“You know, if she chose to buy her brothers a present for Christmas, or something, I didn’t want to make her show them to me and ruin the surprise for them,” Burke explained.

This weekend, Burke knows her family’s Christmas won’t be big or extravagant, but thanks to Iyanna’s kind gesture and the hope it gave two church families, everyone she touched will greet it with a brighter outlook and a blessing full of a child’s simple joy.

“She has a really big heart,” Burke said.

— Contact Tammie Toler at ttoler@ptonline.net.