

Churches note historic Sunday

In uptown Charlotte, preacher urges more barriers to fall in spirit of King and Obama.

By Tim Funk

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The Rev. Greg Busby delivers his sermon, titled "No Barriers," at First United Presbyterian Church in uptown Charlotte Sunday. He spoke about Martin Luther King and about Barack Obama's inauguration at the predominantly black church, which dates to 1866. ROBERT LAHSER - rlahser@charlotteobserver.com

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Turnout was down a bit Sunday at First United Presbyterian's service marking the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But members of the historic black church in uptown Charlotte who were there think the late civil rights leader would have been just fine with that.

After all, the 30 or so missing – out of 150 – were in Washington, celebrating the inauguration this week of America's first black president.

"I think (King) would be truly pleased," said longtime member Ethel Goodwin, 78.

"A lot of people sacrificed their lives to even get us the vote."

King and Obama were mentioned in the same breath all over the city, the country and the world Sunday as Americans prepared for King's holiday today and Obama's historic swearing-in Tuesday.

From First United Presbyterian's pulpit Sunday, the Rev. Greg Busby echoed other black and white preachers who called Obama's election a fulfillment of King's famous dream – uttered in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, where Obama spoke Sunday at a concert that kicked off four days of inauguration festivities. In electing Obama to the White House, Busby told his flock, "we've demonstrated that Dr. King was right. Content of character is more important than someone's skin color. Change is possible. And every child can know in their hearts that he or she *can* grow up to become president of the United States."

Busby urged members of his church – whose history goes back to 1866 – not to stop with President Obama. It's time, he said, for churches to end the racial separation that continues to make 11 a.m. on Sundays the most segregated hour of the week.

"As God is using Barack Obama's election to bring people together," he said, "now is the time for God's people to join God in breaking down these barriers that have kept us apart."

Just as Obama has vowed to reach across the aisle to Republicans and conservatives, Busby added, "Our Lord is looking for us to reach across our aisles. Reach across to that brother whose skin may be a different color."

As the service ended with “We Shall Overcome” – the anthem of the civil rights movement King led – 12-year-old Sydney Mosley, a student at Albemarle Middle, said she was excited a president will finally be the same color as she is. And what would King think on what would have been his 80th birthday this month? “He would love it,” Sydney said.