

BELIEFS & Values

American religious heritage
is a smorgasbord of faithsREV. ALLAN
ECKELMANN

America is a religious smorgasbord. There are thousands of different religious groups, denominations and organizations that dot the land.

The United States has the most diverse religious make-up of any nation in the world. Not only will you find every major religion represented in our country, but you will also find all sorts of sub-groups and break-away groups of every major religion.

In addition to this, you will find a whole host of fringe groups and new religious movements. From Episcopalianism to Voodoo and from Roman Catholicism to Zen, you will find it in this great land of ours.

The rich diversity of American religion is a result of two factors that interrelate with one another. First, there is the reality that we are a nation of immigrants, being blessed with people from every part of the globe. Americans have brought their religious traditions with them from Europe, from Asia, from Africa, from the Middle East and from every other part of the world.

Of course, they were encouraged to do so by the First Amendment to the Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion and non-interference from governmental authority. The First Amendment, therefore, is the other reason why we have such a rich diversity of religious traditions and institutions in our country.

The First Amendment states that Congress shall make no law with regard to the establishment of religion, nor shall it prohibit the free

exercise thereof. In other words, the government shall not establish or recognize any religion over another, nor shall it interfere in the free expression of any religion.

It is informative to note that the First Amendment also guarantees free speech, so that freedom of religion and freedom of expression are legally linked. This is why the press in this country is also free.

The first of our basic freedoms guarantees that both the press and out religious institutions were to be in no way controlled by our government.

The fear was that such governmental control would mean that the government would use these institutions as a means for government propaganda. It was felt that these institutions needed to be free to critique the government when necessary.

You are free to worship according to the dictate of your conscience, the inclination of your reason and the guidance of your spirit. No one can dictate religious practice to you. This is why America is such a religious country.

We, the people, understand that the maintenance of our religious institutions is completely in our own hands. The government will not do it for us, nor will it hinder us. The role of the government is to encourage religion only by not interfering with its free practice.

In Southeast Michigan, we are abundantly blessed by almost every religious group imaginable. These groups may have great differences among them, but the only avenue which they have for enlisting your support is the power of persuasion.

As free people we are allowed to make our own choices with regard to religion.

Please see FOCUS, B8

Zion Temple gives American tribute

BY HARRIET TEMPLETON
SPECIAL WRITER

History buffs and patriotic souls will be thrilled to learn that "George Washington" and "Abraham Lincoln" will be at Zion Evangelistic Temple in Troy this Saturday.

The appearances by two of the nation's most beloved presidents will be part of the second annual "All American Tribute" at 7 p.m. Saturday at Zion Temple.

David and Verna Leo, of Rochester Hills, serve as co-coordinators of the popular program that was viewed by an audience exceeding 1,600 last year. The Leos are longtime members of Zion Evangelistic Temple and Verna Leo is active in the church's music ministry.

The theme of the program is to talk about America's Godly heritage and to have a celebration of liberty," Verna Leo said. "We want to honor the vets and encourage them all to come."

Zion Temple's pastor is Leonard Gardner. His son Dan Gardner, is in charge of the church's music ministry and will oversee the "All American" production which includes more than 200 people.

"It's a really big event. Last year we got great reviews and this year we're even adding a few surprises," Verna Leo said.

The church, whose membership is close to 2,300, hosts and creates three major productions each year. The Christmas and Easter programs are presented over several evenings and are often sold out.

The American Tribute show is three months in the planning and includes major production amenities such as costumes and make-up. Zion Temple boasts a 3,000 seat auditorium with state of the art audio equipment and a huge projection screen for easier viewing of the show.

The 90-minute program includes plenty of instrumental, performances by several choirs and appearances by local and national celebrities at the church. In fact, the Leos' own children,



American tribute: "George Washington" discusses his life and the miracles he has seen in battle at last year's All American Tribute at the Zion Evangelistic Temple in Troy.

Kristen, 14, and Anthony, 10, will be taking part in this weekend's show.

The program begins with one man re-enactments in the characters of our first and 16th Presidents, Washington and Lincoln.

Washington will come out on stage and talk about his life, the war and all the miracles he saw in battle. Lincoln's monologue includes story telling, a reading of the Gettysburg Address, plus he'll sing his favorite tune, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Both men will wear full costume and make-up.

"It should be really exciting and it's nice to be able to salute and recognize the veterans," Verna Leo said.

In the latter part of the show the casts rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner" generally brings the crowd to their feet and the audience joins in the singing. The program is concluded when dozens of colorful balloons and tons of streamers fall from the ceiling of the auditorium.

This is the most well liked

event of the year here," Verna Leo said. "And while it is fun there are some serious things and some touching moments, too."

Senator Matt DeMarkus attend to present the church with a special award of recognition from the state of Michigan.

The event is free to the public, though a free will offering will be taken.

For more information call Zion Evangelistic Temple at (248) 524-1408.

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