

'I'm in the hands of the Lord'

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Shiloh Baptist minister needs a new heart

WAUKEGAN -- Marcus Burnett of Waukegan needs a new heart, but his good deeds can't get him one.

A minister at Shiloh Baptist in Waukegan, where he has counseled and mentored those struggling with joblessness and addiction, he is also known through his work for Manpower, where he helped people move from temporary to permanent employment. His service to community has also included work and volunteer efforts for Waukegan Township, Staben Center, the Lake County Jail, the YMCA and the local Chamber of Commerce.

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Marcus Burnett
Gift of Hope

Organ donation is up among African Americans, according to Jack Lynch, director of community affairs for Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, the federally designated organ procurement agency for northern Illinois and northwest Indiana.

"Our outreach efforts are really turning the corner in terms of expelling the myths and increasing the number of blacks who are saying 'yes' to organ donation," Lynch said. "We recover more organs from African American donors than any other organ procurement agency in the country."

The key to promoting organ donation in the African American community is "speaking with rather than talking at," Lynch said. "The barriers and the walls have been high and we have been consistent in diminishing the fears and reluctance."

Gift of Hope has been so successful, Lynch said, that he has trouble keeping up with demand for speakers.

"But we still have far to go," Lynch said. "Twenty years ago, there were 10,000 people on the national list. Today, there are nearly 100,000 waiting for organ transplants. We're still receiving less than 23 percent of organs that could be used for transplantation."

For more information, call (888) 307-DON8 (3668) or visit: www.giftofhope.org.

But Burnett, 55, knows that neither his faith nor his works and not even the second-highest -- 1B -- ranking on the organ donor list guarantee him a healthy heart.

"Do I have a pipeline?" he chuckled. "Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. I'm in the hands of the Lord. His ways are not mine. It would be selfish of me to want him to save only me. I'm not special. A lot of people are in much worse condition than I am."

But Burnett is special to the Men's Ministry of Shiloh Baptist Church in Waukegan, which will hold a benefit gospel concert Friday on his behalf.

Proceeds from "Songs for the Heart," to be held at 7 p.m. Friday at Waukegan High School, 2325 Brookside Drive, will go to the North-Central Heart Transplant Fund in honor of Burnett, who was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy -- a weakened and enlarged heart -- in 1997. Doctors have determined that a transplant offers his only chance for survival.

Though Burnett is insured, only a portion of his mounting medical bills will be covered. If he receives a transplant, medication following the surgery will cost \$3,000 per month. Last September, he received a ventricular implant which pumps blood to his aorta. The pump operates on electricity.

"You can hear it pumping," Burnett said. "I'm either plugged in or on batteries."

Burnett, who is married and has three grown sons, has been hospitalized many times over the past two years and must visit Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago every week.

Choirs from Greater Faith, Mt. Sinai, First Corinthian and Shiloh Baptist churches will perform. Trumpeter Syreetta Thompson, a 2007-2008 Stellar Award nominee in the Best Instrumental category, will also perform. Thompson has played with gospel greats including Hezekiah Walker.

Burnett said that it's difficult to put his feelings about the benefit into words.

"It's the biggest demonstration of love I have ever received in my life," he said.

Doors to Friday's concert open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 and all donations are tax deductible. Those who are unable to attend but wish to contribute can send a check to: NTAF North-Central Heart Transplant Fund, 150 N. Radnor Chester Road, Suite F-120 Radnor, Penn. 19087. In the memo line of the check, write "In Honor of Marcus Burnett." Credit card payments can be made through www.transplantfund.org or by calling (800) 642-8399.