

Hanover business leaders discuss ethnic diversity

By **ROBERT HOLT**
Times Staff Writer

HANOVER — A Gettysburg theologian and writer told leaders in this York County borough with a troubled racial history Wednesday that they must embrace multicultural diversity as an opportunity and not a problem.

"Even though multiculturalism is a sensitive subject, I see it as a cause for celebration and dialogue. And from that perspective, I hope to inspire, inform and encourage dialogue," Roscoe Barnes III told 20 business and government leaders and high school students during a lunch session.

"I think the best way to approach any kind of problem is to start with communication. Without communication there is very little we can expect to accomplish," he said.

The Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary graduate, an African-American who devotes his free time to gospel preaching, said he intended to offer thoughts and dialogue for leaders of the borough with a predominately caucasian population.

In July 1991, Hanover gained state-wide and national attention after two nights of racial rioting by whites against blacks and their white friends, which resulted in dozens of arrests. The tension continued with other harassment and vandalism against black persons, and eventually led to a downtown demonstration by white supremacists in November 1991.

Barnes did not mention the incident. He did say that promoting multicultural diversity is not an easy task, and all ethnic groups share the responsibility for achieving a sense of unity.

"Those who know me know that I strive for balance. I have a problem with extremes. I often say life is like

a tightrope. We're walking it as best we can, but it's not always easy to remain balanced," Barnes said.

"I mention this because of the extreme views which surface whenever multiculturalism is mentioned, this little 'M-word,' too often we get all of these negative images in mind. This is not uncommon," he explained.

Noting his international travels and experiences with people of various cultures while in the Army, the Mississippi native said interacting with people of different races and cultures can be enriching.

"To me, it's the most fulfilling thing there is. It has given me a world view," said the man who rose out of poverty in the deep South.

The preacher said embracing multicultural diversity locally can do the same for people in most communities. He said Hanover will have to face the issue, because it is a part of the nation's history and the trend of increasing immigration to the U.S. will continue.

An increasingly multicultural society offers "new challenges and fresh opportunities," as well as self-enrichment and education, he said. He said a sensitivity to multiculturalism offers a chance to highlight a person's strengths and benefit commerce.

Barnes offered suggestions for developing a sensitivity and receptiveness to people of different cultures, races and nationalities. He emphasized seeking "common ground" and similarities that can be shared with people who are different and bring out the best in them.

He also encouraged the business leaders to be inquisitive about other cultures and ask questions, not to make any assumptions, and complimentary in seeking a mutual discussion point.

Roscoe on diversity

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roscoebarnes3
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