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# Rev. Perry A. Smith III, a Political Activist, Who May Run for Congress

By Tonya D. Swanson

To Rev. Perry A. Smith III, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Brentwood, Md., politicking and pastoring are inevitable partners. The two are so intricately interwoven, he says, that it is unthinkable that anyone would attempt to separate the two.

"I have to be concerned about the whole being," says Rev. Smith, "so I don't know how to separate the two. I have to be concerned about housing for human beings, feeding the hungry — all things some might consider political — but they are commanded in the Scriptures."

There are, though, admits Rev. Smith, many "conservative" ministers who disagree with his stance on the issue. Some simply feel that the church has as its role the saving of souls and should leave politics alone.

"Anybody who attempts to separate them," says Rev. Smith, continuing his argument, "must have tunnel vision. We must help people to understand what the abundant life is all about. We must do what

we feel led by the Holy Spirit to do. We seek the better life, not just after death, but now."

Rev. Smith maintains that the black church has always been active in meeting the needs of the people through the strongest methods possible. As historical proof, he points to the black churches which served in the underground railroad movement during slavery.

"This is not a new role for the church," says Rev. Smith. "The church has moved in this direction for a long time now. Of course, during the '40s and '50s we went through the process of being anglo-saxonized, if you will. However, once again we've come to understand that our heritage must be preserved."

In keeping with his belief about the natural interdependence of politics and the church, Rev. Smith is currently entertaining the idea of running for a congressional seat in the fifth district.

"My role as pastor," says Rev. Smith, "is to provide leadership not only from



Perry A. Smith III

shackles of sin, but from whatever shackles might bind the people."

It is for these reasons that Rev. Smith says he is eyeing the congressional seat currently being filled by Rep. Steny Hoyer. He says his church, which has a membership of nearly 800 persons, is very supportive of his efforts.

"My congregation is fully aware of what I am involved in, and they have given their blessings. Some are even involved in the campaign."

A graduate of the Howard University School of Theology, Rev. Smith has many times proven his great sense of community throughout his years in Prince George's County where he resides in Lanham.

He has served in the past as president of the county NAACP chapter, and was instrumental from 1965 to 1969 in the county government's anti-poverty program. He has also been involved with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and with The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement.

The 47-year-old Rev. Smith has had the distinguished honor of being nominated for the Rockefeller Public Service Award in 1980. In addition to these few credits extracted from an exhaustive list of them, Rev. Smith is presently serving as chap-

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OVER

## Choice in Prince George's

# 12 Black Ministers Switch to GOP

By Leon Wynter

Washington Post Staff Writer

Armed with stacks of voter registration change cards, 12 black ministers from Prince George's County emerged smiling yesterday from the office of the board of elections in Upper Marlboro as newly registered Republicans.

They said their goal is to convince their congregations and other blacks in the county that the Republican Party offers blacks better access to political power.

"We've been taken for granted by the Democratic Party as if there was no where else to go," said the Rev. Robert Williams, president of Concerned Clergy of Prince George's

County. The concerned clergy represents some 32 ministers and 20 congregations of various sizes in the Washington area.

The party switch was spearheaded by the Rev. Perry Smith, pastor of the 800-member First Baptist Church of North Brentwood, the largest of the 20 congregations.

Smith is expected to announce as a candidate for the 5th Congressional District seat held by freshman Democratic Rep. Steny Hoyer and has been talking with the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee about backing for several months. "I hope that everybody will understand that these men have made a switch based on what they think is best for their people," Smith

said. "None of them is here making an endorsement of Reagan policies."

Another minister who switched, the Rev. William Smith of the Jordan Baptist Church in Capital Heights, complained that, "The Democratic Party has always chosen our leaders. This will give us a chance to choose our own." He said he could produce many new Republicans from his 350-member congregation.

Perry Smith said he hopes to register 10,000 black Republicans. The county's black population has tripled in the last decade and now represents 37 percent of the citizenry. Most of the black voters in Prince George's County are registered Democrats.