

# Church banquet provides a laugh

By **JENICE JOHNSON**  
Neighbors Editor

Everybody's a comedian. And some folks at Peace Tabernacle sure thought so while they cracked jokes until the real entertainment showed up for the church's Christmas banquet Dec. 21 at the Dallas Athletic Club.

While dining on the club's cuisine, the jovial congregation eagerly awaited Christian comedian Walter Campbell's arrival from San Antonio. Until then minister Brook Blakey warmed up the crowd with some real winners and a few amusing hecklers shouted things like, "It ain't funny if you have to explain it."

The room was warm with laughter, good cheer and that occasional good-natured poking fun at Blakey expense, who took the jeers all in stride saying, "Hey, it got laughs on Jay Leno."

And Michael Burden and Rodney Shindoll (who must obviously be the congregation's regular jokesters) ignited several chuckles as they asked around for anybody's left over goodies.

Finally arriving after a few navigation hiccups, Walter Campbell appeared and after barely speaking five minutes, the room split its sides. Self-professed as the first African America to perform at NASCAR Daytona 500, Campbell is a Staff Sgt.

at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

He has opened for the comedian Sinbad and works with the Air Force's expeditionary group Tops in Blue. Although his performance was far from stuffy, Campbell regularly provides clean comedy.

He joked about the San Antonio Spurs non-responsive forward Tim Duncan, the "racial" undertones involved with the game of pool, and his daughter's ascension into womanhood (he has two daughters with another on the way.)

Toward the end of his set, the congregation was consumed with belly-aching laughter from Campbell's jokes. The comedian sensitively admitted to being very touched by their laughter, which he dearly needed for himself.

"Tonight's laughter wasn't for you," he said quietly. "It was for me. Laughter is a gift from God."

Because his wife is showing signs of a possibly difficult pregnancy, he almost didn't come to the Christmas banquet. But he said his wife told him he was doing God's work and to push forward. And with that, he was filled with apparently enough oomph to make everyone in the room laugh hard enough at his earlier set to burn off their dinner.

"You know how people say

'God works in mysterious ways?'" he said. "It is a mystery to us, but God knows what he's doing."

At the end of the night, Pastor James Baker approached the stage and expressed his pride of the packed room and all of the

touched hearts in it. Before leading the congregation in singing "Silent Night," Baker said, "It wouldn't take much to make your pastor cry. Look where the Lord has brought us. Next year we'll need a bigger place."

*Jenice Johnson can be reached by phone at 972-272-6591 ext. 245, or by e-mail at [jsjohnson@dallasnews.com](mailto:jsjohnson@dallasnews.com). You can also submit information to her online at [www.dallasnews.com/neighbors](http://www.dallasnews.com/neighbors).*



**PROVIDING A LAUGH:** Comedian Walter Campbell, a Staff Sgt. at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, is a professional comedian with a clean comedy act.



**CHUMS:** Pastor James Baker chats with comedian Walter Campbell.



**GETTING THE CROWD READY:** Minister Brook Blakey attempts to warm up the crowd with a few of his jokes.

*See PEACE Page 27*

STAFF PHOTOS BY JENICE JOHNSON