

H.O.P.E. Academy opens doors to its

By **Ronnell M. Maybank**
AFRO Staff Writer

A 10-year vision turned into a reality when Rev. P.M. Smith and staff opened the doors to Huber Memorial Church's HOPE Academy Wednesday morning.

HOPE Academy — Helping Our People Excel — is not Baltimore City's first church-based school, but it will be first one in Baltimore to use the Calvert Curriculum, says Rev. Smith.

The only other schools in Baltimore to use this curriculum are the Calvert School, a private school in North Baltimore and two Baltimore City public schools — Carter G. Woodson Elementary and Barclay Elementary/Middle School.

"We chose that curriculum because of its track record," explains Rev. Smith, referring to higher student achievement levels at the schools where it has been used. "Its focus is on basic development of reading and writing. It helps them not just to learn to do it but to love doing it."

The curriculum also stresses math and phonetics with piles of student-produced work that is kept in folders and sent home monthly. Rev. Smith, who became the pastor of the Huber Memorial in

1983, says plans for the school did not get underway until the church relocated last year from The Alameda to its present location on York Road.

After becoming familiar with the building and how it could be properly managed as a school during the first year, Rev. Smith says he consulted several educators and ministers involved in the establishment of other Christian schools for advice.

"That's when we really moved on it," he says. "Before then it was all just talking."

Though adjacent to the church, the school is a separate building that was once used for youth's church activities.

"The church lost space and size as far as the nursery is concerned, but we added a school and its worth it as far as I'm concerned," says Rev. Smith.

As with the nursery, many of the rooms in the building will be designated solely for the academy's usage during the week, according to Principal Helen Jones, who also serves as the first- and second-grade teacher. The academy has 19 children enrolled for its pre-K through second-grade program. Only about four of the children's parents are members of the church.

Two classrooms, a multi-purpose room used for assemblies and lunch, a computer lab, administrative offices and a library are the main areas of the school. In the future Rev. Smith says the additional rooms upstairs will serve as classrooms and chapel will be used for morning assemblies.

"We're very excited about the school," says Wanda Dixon, early childhood instructor.

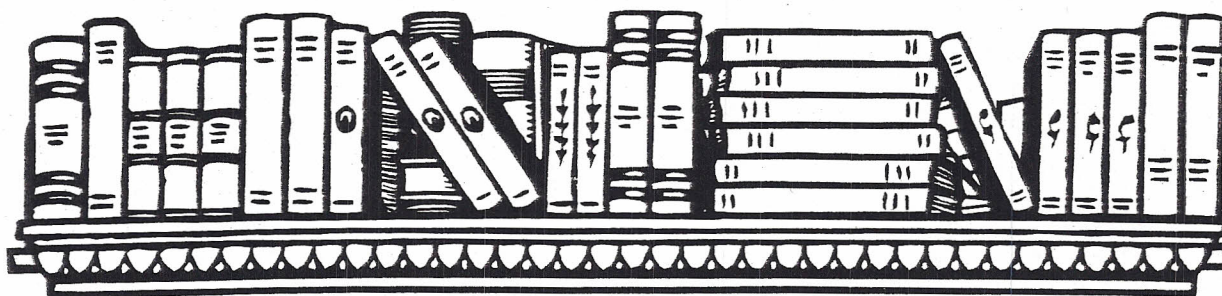
On the first day, the children, dressed in yellow and green uniforms, followed the yellow footprints in the main hallway to their classrooms.

Kamaiya McCullough, 3, says her favorite part of the day was during the coloring activities, while Travis Thomas, a second grader, says he enjoyed playing the snail race game the most.

But fun and games were not all children engaged in. There was also a time to share with each other about each child's family.

Along with sharing Principal Jones says the school will focus on multi-cultural and spiritual development with field trips, bible lessons, music, physical education, art classes. In the afternoons, dance classes will also be offered for children ages four and five.

"We're trying to network with the



first year at Huber Memorial Church

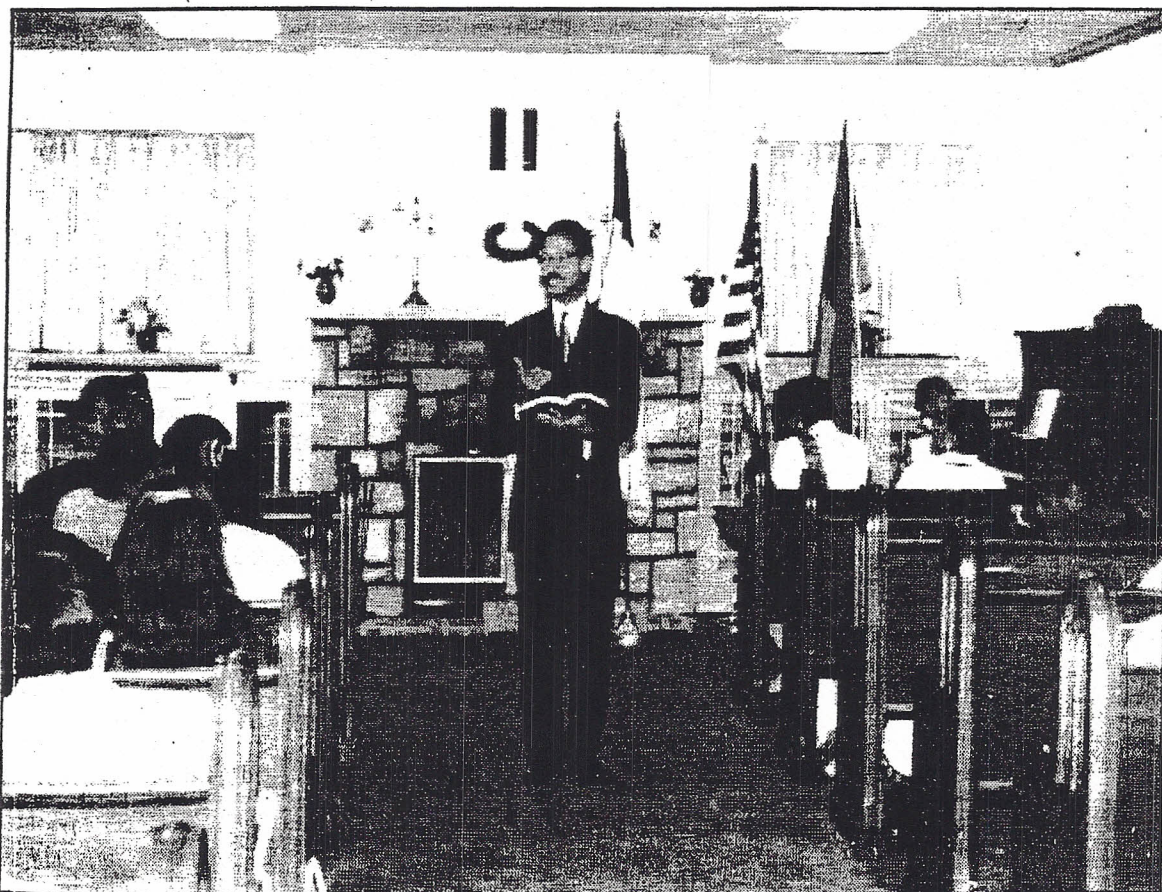
community and not just leave the school as a separate entity," Ms. Jones says. "We're going to do whatever it takes to enrich their educational experience."

Besides preparing them academically, spiritually and

culturally, Rev. Smith says part of the focus will be on the students' personal development and relationship building.

"The success is incomplete unless you do something to build their character," he says. "We need to

build into our children the importance of relationships, the importance of hope, faith and respect and we have the opportunity here to put this before the little ones and hammer and drive that home."



Photos by Dana Coleman

Rev. P.M. Smith, of Huber Memorial Church, conducts the first-day opening assembly for parents and youth in HOPE Academy's chapel.



H.O.P.E. Academy
Opening Day – September 1996
Ribbon Cutting Ceremony