

THE MORNING CALL

Harlem activist preaches power to the poor; Calvin O. Butts III speaks in Easton for Black History Month

By Matt Assad Of The Morning Call

Calvin O. Butts III has whitewashed tobacco billboards, led boycotts of companies that discriminate against blacks and spent the last decade helping to pump \$300 million in development into his Harlem community.

On Sunday, the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem was in Easton telling nearly 500 members of Greater Shiloh Baptist Church that their fight for equality is far from over.

In an hourlong sermon scheduled to commemorate Black History Month, Butts told people they can use their church not just for worship and education, but also to bring political and economic change in their community.

Comparing blacks to a river flowing through the nation, Butts said America rests on a foundation built by African-Americans -- from the black soldiers who helped win the Civil War to southern blacks who migrated north to help build what are now some of the nation's largest cities.

"If not for the mighty black river that flowed through North America, there would be no America," Butts said. "There is no salvation without the shedding of blood."

Butts has spent 10 years trying to bring that salvation to Harlem. As a pastor, he has fought against police brutality in New York, boycotted businesses he believed held racist policies and led a campaign to rid Harlem of tobacco advertising. Most recently, he has led a movement protesting rap lyrics that are violent or disrespectful to women.

But Butts' activism has not been limited to protests. He is president of the 3000-student **State University of New York's College at Old Westbury**, and through his Abyssinian Development Corp. has spurred more than \$300 million in housing and commercial development in Harlem.

As Shiloh officials urged members to attend a grant-writing seminar at the church this week, he urged the church not to be shy about seeking economic help from government or local banks.

"Make no apologies," Butts said. "It is rightfully ours. It is our equity. We have spent 250 years investing in America, without just reward. I'm here to remind you of your investment in America."

Though he stood behind a pulpit, his sermon was more focused on politics and black history than religion. Most broadly, Butts directed his words at the poor -- of any color.

"Poor people need to unite," Butts said. "If poor folk -- black and white -- ever got together in America, we could turn this whole thing upside down."

