



FILMMOVEMENT

*Let the Church Say Amen*

*A film by David Petersen*



Running Time: 87 minutes

Distributor Contact:  
Josh Levin  
Film Movement  
375 West Broadway 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10012  
212-941-7744 ext. 213  
[josh@filmmovement.com](mailto:josh@filmmovement.com)

## SYNOPSIS

Over the course of a year, **Let the Church Say Amen** chronicles the daily life surrounding World Missions for Christ Church in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Like many urban communities that haven't benefited from America's prosperity, these citizens face challenges that would be shocking for any U.S city, let alone that of the nation's capitol: rampant unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and violence. Yet the strength of this community comes from a storefront church of modest resources and great spiritual power. Years ago the space was a corner store, now it serves as a sanctuary where members gather every Sunday to sing, pray, testify, and through the power of their faith, work to change the community.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

### THE CHURCH AND THE DOCUMENTARY

In conducting our research for *Let the Church Say Amen*, we looked at over 400 small churches in both New York and the Nation's Capitol, searching for the one church that astonished us, that had the kind of leadership, outreach, and commitment to its community to represent the thousands of small churches that strengthen cities across the country. In the very last stage of our search, we were blessed to discover World Missions for Christ Church, a powerful red Interdenominational church in the Shaw District, one block west of North Capitol Street. Originally founded through the vision of Rev. Dr. JoAnn Perkins, who now directs the church's multifaceted outreach and Extension Center program, the church is pastored by Rev. Bobby Perkins, Sr. along with his wife First Lady Gail S. Perkins.

For two years, we had the honor of spending an intimate, joyful, and sometimes challenging time filming the lives of the World Missions congregation, recording how faith transforms a city community. As filmmakers, we weren't regular members of the church, but were always embraced as such, and had the privilege of traveling on our own spiritual journey while following those in our story. By doing so, we wanted a PBS audience to feel as if they had lived with each person, shared their conflicts and joys, and seen the outside world from their perspective. By giving a neighborhood and its church a face and an individual story, we hoped to create a very different portrait of inner city life than the stereotypes often depicted on television – one of dignity, power, and self-determination.

The "world" of World Missions for Christ Church begins on a street corner and truly goes out to the rest of the world. Ministering to those most in need on the street and in the community, the church offers an incredible array of programs for its modest size. These include: an After School Homework Center, Community Book Club for over 1500 children, a Saturday Cultural Awareness Program; Clothes and Food Give Away Programs. In keeping with its mission of providing educational training services which positively impact the lives of youth and adults in inner-city communities, the church holds 7 rallies a year, offering health services, prayer mobilization, scholarship awards, Thanksgiving baskets, and toys for needy kids. The church also partners with numerous organizations including the National Cathedral School for Girls, McLean Bible Church, the Metropolitan Police Department, as well as many social service organizations such as House of Ruth, the Spring Road Family Shelter, Oak Hill Prison, Gateway

Youth Aftercare Homes, Emery Shelter the Harry Thomas Community Service Center. On the horizon is the creation of an Early Childhood Development Center.

In a verité style, the documentary tracks the powerful and dramatic turns in the lives of four church members, with World Missions for Christ serving as the anchor for their stories and for the documentary. Originally founded by Rev. Dr. JoAnn Perkins, with the support of her mother and eleven siblings, the church has not only saved the lives of those in the community, but those in the Perkins family. While living on welfare, JoAnn Perkins earned a Ph.D. in Special Education through the scholarships at Georgetown University, yet she saw that, by living in the city, her brother Bobby had slipped into a dangerous drug addiction. In a powerful and dramatic sequence in the documentary, Bobby Perkins Sr. testifies how he got saved from a path of certain destruction by joining the church, prompting his sister to give up her title and make him pastor. **Let the Church Say Amen** then follows the stories of three other members, beginning with Darlene Duncan, a mother of eight children, who wants to get off public assistance by training to become a nurse's assistant, despite the disadvantage of having only a sixth grade education. Another featured member, David Surles, lost his job, children and home to substance abuse, and now lives and works in a homeless shelter. By working odd jobs and saving every penny, he hopes to reunite his family by buying a house with a backyard and a tree. Singer and evangelist Ceodtis Fulmore or "Brother C," as the church calls him, wasn't to reach out to the young people by producing a religious CD. His concerns about his own children and family who live in a troubled neighborhood prompted his vision for the music ministry.

Fifty years since the Brown vs. Board Education decision to improve the lives of people of color in American society, the rewards have yet to reach many residents of Washington, D.C. World Missions for Christ Church is representative of an urban phenomenon which has been fundamental to African American, and now to Hispanic, city life since the early 1900s. Growing out of a need to reach the most disadvantaged citizens at the street level, these small churches sprang up as life rafts of faith in almost every American city during the Great Depression. Though they have rarely been recognized by the media till now, these small churches have become indispensable fixtures in the urban landscape of America, transforming a city block into a religious and social service center which provides support for its members and surrounding neighbors. In an age when fundamentalist religion evokes fears of intolerance, cultists, and terrorism, **Let the Church Say Amen** offers a broader insight into why it plays such an important role in human society.

## Crew

|                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Henry Louis Gates, Jr.</b> | Executive Producer                |
| <b>David Petersen</b>         | Director/Producer/Editor          |
| <b>Mridu Chandra</b>          | Producer                          |
| <b>Martha Southgate</b>       | Associate Producer                |
| <b>Amy Hobby</b>              | Associate Producer                |
| <b>Brett Wiley</b>            | Director of Photography           |
| <b>Thomas Roma</b>            | Collaborating Photographer        |
| <b>Phillipian Judkins</b>     | Sound Recordist                   |
| <b>Mario Lathan</b>           | Field Research. Editing Assistant |
| <b>Sam Pollard</b>            | Consultant                        |

**William Julius Wilson**      Advisor  
**Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy**      Advisor  
**Rev. Imogene Stewart**      Advisor

## ABOUT THE CREW

**David Petersen** (Director/Producer/Editor) has had his films exhibited at numerous international museums and festivals, including The Centre Georges Pompidou, The Museum of Modern Art and The National Gallery of Art. His Academy Award® nominated documentary *Fine Food, Fine Pastries, Open 6 to 9*, also won an Emmy and CINE Golden Eagle award. His PBS documentary *If You Lived Here You Would Be Home Now* won a CINE Golden Eagle Award and was an Independent Spirit Award Nominee. He currently produces for the new national PBS arts program *Egg*, presented by WNET in New York.

**Henry Louis Gates, Jr.** (Executive Producer), the chair of Harvard's prestigious Afro-American studies department, is one of the most prominent and well-known academics in the U.S. today. As a critic and editor, Gates contributed to broadening the discourse on African American literature with books like *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the Racial Self* (1987) and *The Signifying Monkey: Towards a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (1988).

**Brett Wiley** (Director of Photography) has been the Director of Photography for numerous documentaries, including the HBO film *City at Peace*. Additionally, he has served as cinematographer for the PBS Frontline series—including *The Crash, Return of the Czar* about Vladimir Putin, and *Washington's Other Scandal* about campaign finance issues during the Clinton Presidency. He has also worked on Bill Moyers' PBS specials, including *Trade Secrets*, and one currently in production about the North American Free Trade Agreement.

## FESTIVAL HISTORY

*Let the Church Say Amen* made its U.S. premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. Director David Petersen received an Academy Award® nomination for his previous documentary, *Fine Food, Fine Pastries, Open 6 to 9*. *Let the Church Say Amen* played numerous other events film festivals including an appearance at The Smithsonian.

## REVIEWS



### Sundance 2004

Posted: Tue., Jan. 27, 2004, 10:15pm PT

## Let the Church Say Amen

(Docu)

An Independent Television Service presentation. Produced by David Petersen, Mridu Chandra. Executive producer, Henry Louis Gates Jr. Directed, edited by David Petersen.

**With:** Pastor Bobby Perkins, Dr. JoAnn Perkins, Brother Ceodtis Fulmore, David Surlles, Darlene Duncan

**By** SCOTT FOUNDAS

**"I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold," goes a lyric from one of the rousing spirituals sung by members of Washington, D.C.'s World Missions for Christ Church. It could also serve as an alternate title for "Let the Church Say Amen," David Petersen's modest but affecting portrait of grassroots community activism undertaken by those who seek only God's glory as their reward. Populated by memorable characters whose commitment to humanity supersedes religious affiliation, docu should receive a warm reception from festival auds and from television viewers when it airs later this year on PBS' "Independent Lens" series.**

Located in the shadow of the White House, the World Missions Church seems held together by faith like the lives of some of its parishioners. A true storefront operation, the building is a makeshift assemblage of pews with stained upholstery, unadorned light bulbs and carpet held together by electrical tape. But when Pastor Bobby Perkins steps to the pulpit, his fiery orations are so impassioned that all other considerations fall by the wayside.

Perkins is a reformed drug addict who credits the church, originally formed by his sister JoAnn, with his salvation. Now, he has become an important leader in the community, using his own self-empowerment to reach out to others in need. As "Let the Church Say Amen" unfolds -- spending a year in the company of its subjects -- it catches viewers up in the elation of once-broken lives repaired and of people driven by an irrepressible desire to do good.

In addition to the Perkinses, pic follows David Surlles, a homeless jack-of-all-trades who first came to the church to repair a plumbing leak and never left; Darlene Duncan, a nursing student and mother of eight who makes no distinction between her real family and her church family; and Ceodtis "Brother C" Fulmore, whose dream of spreading the faith through gospel music was only strengthened by the tragic death of his eldest son. Long before pic's end, Peterson has made viewers care deeply about these people, and he does it without ever once asking the viewers for pity.

Camera (color, DV), Brett Wiley. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (American Spectrum), Jan. 19, 2004.  
Running time: 86 MIN.

## **ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT**

**Film Movement** is an innovative new film distribution company, created as a solution for millions of consumers across the nation whose access to outstanding film is limited by geography, lifestyle or lack of information. Film Movement has members in over 50 states and 1200 cities. Film Movement acquires award winning independent films from the world's top festivals, which they then release each month of the year to members on DVD through a subscription service, and theatrically through The Film Movement Series. Participating filmmakers are able to reach under-served film fans everywhere through Film Movement.

**The Film Movement Series** is a new theatrical film series featuring some of the best in original world cinema. Created by the team that invented the groundbreaking Shooting Gallery Film Series, Film Movement will release 6 of its 12 films per year in leading independent cinemas in major US cities to help outstanding filmmakers find the audience they deserve. All films are available to members exclusively on DVD upon theatrical release so that they may participate regardless of where they live.

Film Movement has partnered with some of the leading independent theaters in the country to exhibit the Film Movement Series. The schedule includes the following films:

- Wiebke von Carolsfeld's *Marion Bridge*
- Eric Eason's *Manito*
- Scott Hamilton Kennedy's *OT: our town*
- Donovan Leitch & Rebecca Chaiklin's *The Party's Over*
- Tjebbo Penning's *Morlang*
- Mina Shum's *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity*
- Vicente Amorim's *The Middle of the World*
- Jacques Doillon's *Raja*
- Tony McNamara's *The Rage in Placid Lake*
- Rolf de Heer's *Alexandra's Project*