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## Web site guides believers to churches

By **Chick Jacobs**  
Staff writer

Earl McLaurin's heart stayed with his small, home-town church.

The rest of him has been all over the place.

That's one reason the Fayetteville native thinks his Web site, [PraisePreview.com](http://PraisePreview.com), will find an appreciative audience. In a world where mobility is a given, he believes people will always want to return home when it comes to worship.

"I've been to small churches, and I've been to some really big ones," McLaurin said. "And I'm just a small-church sort of person."

He's definitely going small church this steamy afternoon in Fayetteville. McLaurin visited his home church, Pleasant Grove Church of Christ, tucked on Racepath Street near the Cape Fear River.

"It's my home, where I met Jesus," he said as he looked around the cozy church of his childhood.

On [PraisePreview.com](http://PraisePreview.com), it's every bit as impressive as mega-churches such as the 8,000-member University Park Baptist in Charlotte.

That's by design, McLaurin said. By presenting churches in the same light, he says, the Web site puts the focus on what's important. "The emphasis is not on the building; it's on the Gospel of Jesus," he said.

[PraisePreview.com](http://PraisePreview.com) was launched this spring, a collaboration between McLaurin and Ronnie Lewis of Charlotte. Lewis, who moved to Charlotte from Los Angeles, was overwhelmed by the selection of churches in his new town.

McLaurin's mother is Margaret McLaurin, retired personnel director for Cumberland County schools. He remembered how hard it was for her to find a suitable house of worship on her weekend trips.

If it was tough for folks like them to find a new church, it was just as tough for others.

McLaurin and Lewis brainstormed, creating a Web site that newcomers could visit to learn about churches in their areas.

"A lot of churches have excellent Web sites, but there was not one location people could go to find them," McLaurin said.

"With our site, a person can click on geographic area, denomination, church size, and they can find the church that's right for them."

"One use that has come up is for parents of kids heading off to college. The parents will learn everything about the school, but when their child gets there, they may know nothing about their opportunities for worship. This way, a student can find the church that's the best fit for them before they even leave home."

The site offers more than just directions and congregation size. Depending on how much information a church gives, each entry can offer times of worship service, background on the ministers, even upcoming events.

"Some churches embrace it more than others," he said. "Some churches are more comfortable with the technology. But that's why we have all these churches. People have different preferences, but they want to worship the same God."



Staff photo by Cindy Burnham  
**Earl McLaurin sits in his home church, Pleasant Grove Church of Christ.**

McLaurin ran headlong into the differences in church size when he married Tondra Crumpler. She was from Lewis Chapel Baptist Church, one of the biggest in Fayetteville. His home church congregation could fit in one of her church's Sunday school classrooms.

"That's exactly the sort of thing people are up against when they come to a new town," he said. "Think of someone in the military coming to Fayetteville. There are a bunch of churches to work through. This will help people find the right church for them."

There's no charge for viewers to use [PraisePreview.com](https://www.praisepreview.com), which is averaging about 5,000 hits per month now. Churches pay an annual subscription to be listed. "There are no banner ads, nothing flashy like that," he said.

The site also has a strong Southern flavor, reflecting research by the duo.

"We did our homework," McLaurin said. "We looked at population and migration patterns, and there are a lot of people moving back to the South. It made sense to start there."

Future plans include links to other religious sites, Bible-based trivia games and gospel-music links.

"We're building the site slowly," McLaurin said. "We want to keep growth manageable. But it's exciting to be at church and hear from people who learned about the site from someone else, through word of mouth. That means we're doing things right."

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