

PASADENA STAR-NEWS OPINION

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Maranatha: Glory days

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

THE middle-aged woman walking her small dog looked as if I was speaking to her in a foreign language.

"Excuse me, can you tell me where Maranatha High School is?" I asked.

After three more queries, her puzzled look turned into one a New Yorker would give a New Jerseyite. It was as if she was saying, "If you don't go back to where you came from I'll tell Fifi to charge."

I rolled up my car window, got back onto Orange Grove and turned right on Green Street and into the parking lot of a peculiar looking, honey-combed building. Not it. I passed the majestic columns of the Ambassador Auditorium and its reflecting pool. Still not it. Then I remembered something about South St. John Avenue on the school's Web site and farther south, I saw a scene right out of a private high school: a parking lot full of vans and SUVs filled with soccer moms, some driving from Monrovia, Temple City and even Covina.

Still, what really caught my eye was not a heavenly sign or a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but an urban miracle nonetheless: a subterranean parking lot with



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hilltop in Sierra Madre, but the city and neighbors blocked the bid. But the folks at Maranatha, armed with the faith of Abraham and the patience of Job, journeyed on. They now have one of the most gorgeous high school campuses in the San Gabriel Valley. To add glory to glory, they were recently granted permission by the city to build 26 homes on the One Carter (hillside) property in Sierra Madre.

Inside the gymnasium, a sign directs students to the indoor pool. The basketball court has been refurbished with a spanking-new wood floor with the school's logo. The music played before the boys varsity game was "Jesus Walks" by Kanye West. *Jesus walks with me with me*

Armed with the faith of Abraham and the patience of Job, Maranatha High School has found a home in the land of milk and honey at the former campus of the Worldwide Church of God.

with me

(Continued from column 1)

a ballfield on top. Girls in shorts and nylon jerseys stretched leg muscles. Boys whooped it up on the soccer field — all this sports activity was attached to 10 tons of concrete high above SUVs and mini-vans in parking stalls. It was like a sports stadium in the clouds. But my sons were playing against their basketball team, and I was looking for the gymnasium. I asked a mom, standing on the sky turf, where the gym was. "I have no idea," she said.

Maranatha High School is a babe in the woods, literally. It has existed less than three months on the campus of the former Worldwide Church of God in West Pasadena, so neighbors — even some parents or new students — may not know of its whereabouts. But those affiliated with the private, Christian high school, whose name when translated means "Come quickly, Lord," may be thinking they have found the Promised Land. And I can't blame them.

The campus sits on the most well-manicured hillsides in Pasadena — 13 acres of landscaped gardens, gurgling streams and well-situated buildings (the entire area is 31 acres). The school, which was founded in 1965, has been on a journey similar to that of Abraham. Or maybe tantamount to the nation of Israel's 40 years in the desert. Following divine direction, it moved from Arcadia to old, middle-school buildings in Sierra Madre, to a former missionary school campus in Northwest Pasadena until this September, when it opened classes at its new home, a land flowing with milk and honey.

But the school's journey was fraught with potholes. They tried for two years to build its campus on a pristine

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I slipped out of the gymnasium and walked up the hillside, beyond the 38,000-square-foot student center/cafeteria and the classroom building with science labs. I sat on a garden bench listening to the conjunction of babbling brooks and enthusiastic soccer players yelling "Go! Go!"

I jotted notes by the light of the Mission-style lanterns, whose soft glow was adequate but did not break the mood. I glanced up and saw the floodlights bathing the physical education building, which still had vestiges of stained glass at the apex.

Jesus walks ... the only thing I pray is that my feet don't fail me now ... went the loudspeakers. The school's teams lost but only by a few points. The award-winning cheerleaders stood on the sidelines in freshly pressed red-and-blue uniforms.

"These are very clean-cut kids," said a security guard, who told me he wished his boy at home would stop wearing baggy, gang-like clothing. I had wandered too far west, into the apartments portion of the land, and he gently guided me back. The auditorium, to the north, was being used by Harvest Rock Church, a charismatic following closing in on 1,000 members, and partly by the school for drama presentations.

... God show me the way because the devil's trying to break me down.

The school has broken the devil's chains applied by (preservationists? City Hall?) and is building a program that will put Maranatha High School on the map.

That's no rap.

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