

Black Churches Focus on Health

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James Tate used to arrive early at First Baptist Church of Glenarden so that he could find a wider seat in the handicapped section of the Upper Marlboro sanctuary to accommodate his 415-pound frame.

But today the 33-year-old former high school lineman from Southeast Washington can sit anywhere in the church because he has lost more than 200 pounds, thanks to a church-based weight loss program.

“It feels good to be an example that people can follow,” said Tate, who works as an information technology specialist and is in school to become a certified nutrition and fitness instructor.

First Baptist is among many big African American congregations locally and across the country that in recent years have decided to make health and wellness a major priority. The health ministries’ efforts range from nutrition to Zumba classes to showing parishioners how a healthy lifestyle is promoted in scripture.