

Volunteering San Francisco



HAPPY DAY: Rev Cecil Williams (top), his wife Jan (middle), Will Smith in *The Pursuit of Happyness* (above), and Glide volunteers (left).

Glide on down and get a taste of the holy spirit

Glide Memorial Church has a unique service worth rising early for, writes **Angela Saurine**

THERE'S a seven-piece band in the corner with an excitable African-American guy in a brown pinstripe suit on the keyboard – he looks like he's had a role in every movie about Motown ever made. If you close your eyes, you'd be forgiven for thinking the woman who gets up to sing is Mariah Carey. She is supported by an enthusiastic 100-strong choir, made up of all colours, ages and genders. Soon the Reverend Cecil Williams appears, much to the delight of the large crowd

packed into San Francisco's Glide Memorial United Methodist Church. The African-American minister is a celebrity in these parts, not least because of his link to the Will Smith movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*. The film is based on the bestselling autobiography of self-made millionaire Chris Gardner, who once turned to Glide for help when he found himself homeless on the streets of San Francisco with his young son. Getting up early on a Sunday morning to go to church isn't

usually high on my list of priorities when I am on holidays. But not only had I got up early – despite my jetlag – I'd actually moved my flight forward two days after being told I simply must hear the soulful singing at Glide. I knew that the fact I wasn't affiliated with any particular religion wouldn't be a problem. When Williams was appointed to the church in 1964, he threw the doors open to everyone – hookers, pimps, drug addicts and teenage runaways from the Tenderloin community and other poor neighbourhoods.

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