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Mobile clinic offers free dental service

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One of two mobile dental clinics run by the N.C. Baptist Men spent most of Saturday in Burlington, parked at Holly Hill Baptist.

Three dentists and several hygienists with Fuller Dental Practice met with 22 patients who don't have dental insurance, performing fillings and tooth extractions free of charge. Each of those patients had 45-minute appointments.

"We're doing a lot of extractions today, just because there is no free or reduced cost practice right now in Alamance County," said Stephanie Gordon, who handles patient relations for Fuller Dental Practice. "We try our best to do anything we can to volunteer for the community in dental health."

Dr. Rawley Fuller III tried to squeeze in advice and consultation between the procedures, he said.

It was the first time Holly Hill Baptist has hosted the dental bus. Rev. Kenny Black, pastor there, said the mobile clinic meets the community's needs and fulfills the church's mission.

"I think it's patterned after our lord and savior, Jesus Christ, who first met people's physical needs and then ministered to them spiritually," Black said. "It's a great service to the community, especially in the hard times we're in."

He hopes the church can bring the bus back in 2014.

The N.C. Baptist Men began the mobile clinic in 1989. The original bus is now a permanent clinic near Murphy. Two other buses traverse the Piedmont and Coastal regions. The bus that stopped in Burlington neatly accommodated two exam rooms, an autoclave and sink for sterilization, two x-ray units and all the necessary equipment for routine dentistry.

The clinics accept anyone without dental insurance, and appointments are scheduled based on the priority of their needs.

Holly Hill Baptist sent fliers about the clinic out, but got most response from a sign about the clinic in front of the church, which is on South Church Street across from Holly Hill Mall. Congregants scheduled appointments last weekend.

Churches and organizations that host the clinics pay \$7 per patient, mileage for the buses and volunteers' travel expenses. It's also up to the host to find dentists to staff the clinic, Black said.

Sue Copelan, a retired ER nurse with 45 years' experience, has volunteered with the clinics about three years. People need the service everywhere the bus stops, she said.

"I'm not surprised by the need, but what has surprised me is the number of people who need it. It seems there are more and more because no one wants to offer dental

insurance anymore,” Copelan said. “This morning someone said, ‘Thank you, my Christmas is going to be better because of this.’ That makes it all worth it.”