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HIGHER POWER

He puts faith in 4 funny panels

Artist Kevin Frank says the concept of his comic strip is simple -- it's a ministry.

Mark I. Pinsky | Sentinel Staff Writer

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PHOTOS



Heavenly humor (KING FEATURES SYNDICATE) Sep 6, 2006



Heaven's love (KING FEATURES SYNDICATE) Sep 6, 2006

For a century, newspaper cartoonists have been drawing on the divine for inspiration.

Most of the time, these are innocuous gags about heaven and hell, or embarrassing moments in church in cartoons such as "Dennis the Menace" and "Family Circus."

Recently, some comic strips have taken on a satirical edge, such as Doug Marlette's "Kudzu," which features a buffoonish preacher named Will B. Dunn as a regular character.

Kevin Frank is taking a distinctly different path, with a wry, gentle strip called "Heaven's Love Thrift Shop." The Sunday-only strip, which debuted last month, is built around a church (denomination not specified), and is syndicated nationally by King Features. It now appears in about 20 papers, mostly in smaller and middle-sized markets.

The strip's three main characters include the store's director, its manager and one of its workers, a recent, zealous convert to Christianity. Proceeds from the shop go to support charitable work, such as soup kitchens and homeless shelters.

Frank, 43, began doing cartoons for the church bulletin of his rural, Mennonite congregation Peoria, Ill. For 15 years he lived and worked with a national youth ministry, Jesus People, U, a volunteer in homeless shelters and soup kitchens, as well as thrift stores. He now lives in Ontario, Canada, with his wife and three children. An evangelical, Frank has a greater purpose mind for the strip.

"I do see it as a ministry," he says. "My simple goal is to remind people there is a God, and God loves them. If I can communicate that God loves people in newspapers across America, I'll consider it a success."

King Features' editor Jay Kennedy had wanted to launch a Christian comic strip for 10 years says, adding, "Faith is a way a lot of people define themselves."

Frank's supporters are hopeful, given the long odds for survival, much less for success. A sit

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