

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Holy Week at Epworth Children's Home was eventful to say the least. Volunteers, staff and the local business community worked diligently to ensure that every child experienced the joy of "New Life" in the Spiritual and literal sense.

Good Friday began with a visit from a group of 29 soldiers in NCO Training at Fort Jackson. They came with hundreds of Easter eggs, lunch and their own stories of motivation and determination to share with the children. A traditional Good Friday service was held later in the afternoon for the children and others on campus. Saturday was a typical day around campus with activities and Cottage Partner events. Easter Sunday was anything but typical.

On Easter morning at 7:00 AM the children arrived at the "Son Rose" service with sleepy eyes. As Rev. Megan Gray, Campus Pastor at Epworth Children's Home, spoke about the events of the day she laughed and said, "It was an Easter miracle;

all the children were on time for our Son Rose service!" Others around her laughed, knowing that getting more than 75 children to worship by 7:00 AM is a challenge. The service was followed by the "traditional" sausage-pancake "corndog" breakfast provided by Pastor Megan and her family. As the children entered the dining hall, they were each surprised by their very own Easter Basket full of every goodie imaginable. These gifts were provided by a group of employees from SCANA.

After some time to return to their cottages and explore their new baskets, the children all dressed up in their new Easter outfits, some of them complete with hats. The entire campus paused at 4:00 PM on Easter Sunday for worship in the sanctuary. Six of Epworth's residents were baptized by Pastor Meagan, and her daughter Blaine was baptized during the same service by Rev. Russell Freeman, Pastor at Red Bank UMC.

Continued on Page 5



Expectations and Opportunity

Spring 2012

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

Several weeks ago I was having a chat with one of our high school seniors. I had heard through the campus grapevine that (I'll call him Mike) had been pushing against the boundaries of the behavior expected of an Epworth resident, so I invited him to come to my office for a visit.

On the appointed date and time Mike arrived for his appointment. He was nicely dressed, well groomed and appeared to be in a pleasant mood as "Miss Sherri" ushered him into my office.

After our initial handshake and greeting Mike and I talked a little about his day and how he was doing. Then we focused on the reason for my inviting him for a conversation. I told him what I had heard and why what I had heard concerned me. Mike was a bit embarrassed but was not defensive. He was candid and articulate.

During our conversation we talked about opportunity, expectations, what he wanted from life, and making decisions that line up with where he wants to go in life and how all of these elements are a major part of his Epworth experience. Mike appeared to be open and accepting, and I tried not to lecture. He smiled a self conscious smile and dropped his head when I told him that he had all the tools to be very successful in life and that I was proud of him.

After our talk he rose to leave, moved toward the door, hesitated, turned back toward me and said "I want to invite you to come to my graduation." I responded by saying "I have it on my calendar. I plan to see you walk across the stage at Dreher."

Since that time spent with Mike, I and other staff members have received formal graduation invitations from Mike and his Epworth classmates. One arrived this week from a former resident who, even though he is living in another town, wants to share this milestone in his life with us.

By the time you read this article I, and many of my colleagues at Epworth will have watched our seniors graduate and step into the next chapter of their lives. We will have watched like proud parents and said in our hearts "Thank you God for this amazing place of grace and opportunity."

Thank you to Reshma Lustman for providing the cover photo and special Easter photos for the children. You can see more of her work at www.bluesilkphotography.com.

Senior Status... looking toward the future

Ms. Laurie Brandes, Minister of Higher Education and Youth, has been working diligently with Epworth's High School seniors as they plan for what happens next in their lives. Epworth has a very large graduating class this year. They each come from various home situations and have very different gifts and abilities. They also each have very different dreams.

Kayla* has lived at Epworth for two years and is a role model for other residential students. She has excellent grades and will attend Spartanburg Methodist College. She is an active leader in church activities, played on the Epworth basketball team and runs track for her high school. She is considering a career in medicine.

Autumn* came to live at Epworth in December when her former group home closed. She has a job at a local sporting goods store and plans to study nursing at Midlands Technical College.

Shelley* has lived at Epworth for four years. She recently obtained her cosmetology license and was awarded two scholarships at the Foster Parents' Association meeting in April. She is awaiting college admission decisions at this time, and is planning to pursue a business degree.

Kesha* has lived at Epworth for four years and will enter Job Corps after high school graduation. She joyfully sings in the choir at Epworth Memorial UMC and is often working behind the scenes in the Epworth dining hall for meals or special events held on campus.

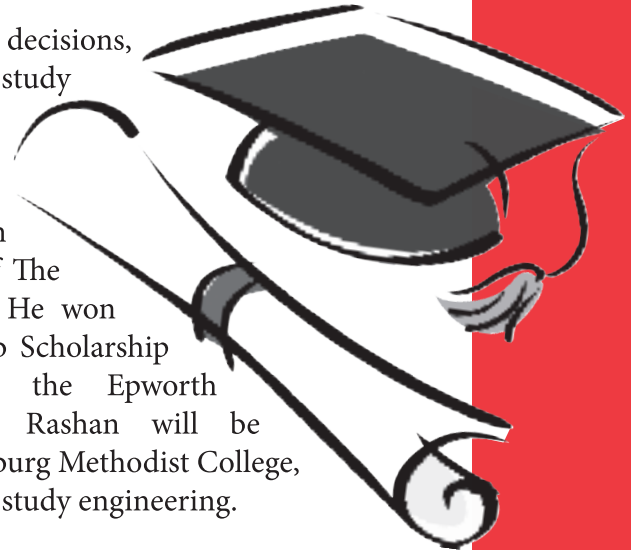
Alley* has lived at Epworth for 18 months. She played basketball on the Epworth team and is a top softball player for her high school. She is awaiting

college admission decisions, and is planning to study criminal justice.

Rashan's* story was featured in the last edition of The Epworth Record. He won the Optimist Club Scholarship and played on the Epworth basketball team. Rashan will be attending Spartanburg Methodist College, and is planning to study engineering.

Mark* has lived at Epworth with his three brothers for four and a half years. He is a member of the Military Vehicle Collectors of SC, which restores military vehicles for living history presentations. Mark plans to enter Job Corps after graduation.

David* came to live at Epworth Children's Home after being homeless for an extended period of time. He left an abusive father and lived on friends' couches until a classmate told him about Epworth. David's dreams will take him around the globe. Passionate about foreign languages and cultures, he takes advanced courses in Chinese and French. He serves as a peer tutor in these areas as well. Other extracurricular activities include theatre and track. On the Epworth campus, David serves as a resilient role model. He sings in the church choir and actively participates in youth group. David will begin work on his Associate's Degree at Spartanburg Methodist College in August 2012. Upon graduation from SMC, he plans to attend the University of South Carolina where he will pursue a career in international affairs.



Welcome to **MOE'S**

The Inaugural Moe's Burrito Dash was a huge success. More than 235 runners leapt from the start line in competition for the \$2,000 first place prize to the male and female runners who could complete the 5k race the fastest while eating a Moe's "racewrecker" burrito at the half way point. Runners came from as far away as Boulder, CO; Boone, NC; and Charlottesville, VA to compete. Many of the runners came simply to support the cause and have a little fun at the same time.

Epworth Children's Home is grateful to Moe's for sponsoring the race to benefit the children and for their gift of \$3,000 to the ministry. We are also grateful to our more than 90 volunteers who served individually or as a part of their Boy Scout group, church group or fraternity.

Moe's hopes to host the race again next year. The goal is to work toward 10,000 racers over the next several years. With your help, we will reach that goal. Please "Like" the Moe's Columbia Facebook page at [Facebook.com/MoesColumbia](https://www.facebook.com/MoesColumbia) where you will stay up to date on all the details for the 2013 race.



Continued from Page 1

Pastor Russell reflected on his experience in his church newsletter:

Each year on Mother's Day, United Methodist Churches across South Carolina receive an offering for Epworth Children's Home. We are usually reminded of this by the little pink envelop falling out of our bulletin as we settle in for worship on that Sunday morning. For most of my life, that little envelop was my connection to Epworth Children's Home and the children who live there. I knew little about the work of this important ministry of the church.

Over the past few years, I have gotten to know more about our Children's Home because of my friendship with Pastor Megan. As we have walked the grounds, I have seen and heard firsthand the wonderful ministry that is happening there. After 40 years as a South Carolina United Methodist, with 18 of those serving as an ordained minister, the Epworth story became personal to me.

This however, did not prepare me for my experience in worship on Easter Sunday. I had the great privilege to participate in the Baptismal Service, as Pastor Megan and her husband Pastor Brad asked me to baptize their new baby girl Blaine.

During the service Pastor Megan baptized six children from Epworth. I watched as she called those who would be baptized forward. They were children of differing age and races from across the state who had been entrusted to Epworth to be cared for during a time when their parents were no longer able to provide that care. As they stood before the congregation and answered the questions found in the liturgy, I thought about the church's role in these children's lives.

I thought about baptism as it is practiced in the Orthodox tradition, where Godparents play a major part, not just in the service, but also in the raising of the child. In the Orthodox tradition you cannot be baptized without a Godparent. During her baptism, Blaine would be surrounded by all

kinds of family and friends who would fulfill in their own way the role of Godparents.

The children from Epworth who stood before us were at first sight surrounded by no one, as if they were standing on their own. In the Orthodox tradition, if an infant has no Godparent he or she is placed on the altar until a congregant comes forward to accept that role. On Easter Sunday, I saw children who had been placed on the altar waiting for someone to take the responsibility of Godparents. On Easter Sunday, I saw United Methodists from across South Carolina accepting that responsibility one pink envelope at a time.

This makes us all Godparents to these children. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, Godparents are called "koumbari," literally meaning, "those who stand with." Koumbari also means in a practical sense that we are now family.

In all my years growing up in the UMC in South Carolina, I had never considered that the girls and boys at Epworth were receiving spiritual instruction that might lead to baptism. I baptized baby Blaine, and it was an honor to be asked. Blaine's baptism looked like so many of the baptisms I have been a part of in my 20 years of ministry. Parents, grandparents, friends, all gathered together to celebrate the occasion of infant baptism. I knew it would be beautiful, moving and touching. This is what I have come to expect from baptism.

What I did not expect was my reaction to watching these young boys and girls who call Epworth home come forward, prepared to receive the baptism for themselves. *(Rev. Russell Freeman)*

On Easter Sunday, staff members, cottage partners, residents, mentors, teachers, tutors and United Methodists stood with the six children from Epworth as they received the gift of Holy Baptism. We welcomed them into the family of God as brothers and sisters of the Body of Christ. This is our calling. This is our ministry. This is our gift and honor.

From a Mentor

Ms. Paula Melton walked onto Epworth's campus just over a year ago as her Leadership Columbia Class took on the project of renovating Doug Gray Cottage. After a year of fundraising and hard work by the 60 adult students from the class, Doug Gray was beautiful. The class gave out awards at their graduation dinner. Ms. Melton's award? "Most likely to pack her bags and move to Epworth."

Since the completion of the class, Ms. Melton has been diligently leading a group called "The Friends of Epworth." They are working hard to plan a gala to benefit Epworth Children's Home. This involves a great deal of time in meetings, but as excited as she is about the success of the gala on February 15, 2013 – her first love is for the children – and in particular, her mentee, Tina*.

"I don't have any children of my own," says Ms. Melton. "The Epworth children are my children, so I tell all my coworkers that it's time for them to support my children. I have bought wrapping paper and fruit for years to support their two children; now it's time for them to support my 70 children!" Ms. Melton laughs at the thought, but she means it. Through the baptismal promises we make to children, all of Epworth's children belong to the church. On Easter Sunday, the power of this truth became very personal for Ms. Melton.

Ms. Melton's mentee, Tina, a 13 year old resident in Dantzler Cottage chose to be baptized on Easter Sunday, and Ms. Melton was there beside her. When they arrived at Worship, Tina looked at Ms. Melton and said, "Ugh, I am the oldest one."

In Ms. Melton's words:

It was an honor to stand beside Tina during her baptism. Just five short months ago, I met a young lady dressed in ripped jeans, a hoodie decorated by her own graffiti pen art and black eye liner so thick that I could hardly see her eyes. One of our first conversations was about school and she said, "I get

bad grades. No one else cares about what I do, so why should I?" I explained to her that throughout life there will be many times when others are consumed with themselves and seemingly do not care about what we are doing, but in no way does that excuse us to not do our best. I further explained that we should always live a life that will allow us to walk with our heads held high, because we are proud of our own accomplishments.

Many things about Tina interest and surprise me; her interest in how much life costs, how much she will need to earn in her future to live the life she desires is one of those things. Another is her gratefulness for anything and everything. She ALWAYS says, "Thank you."

I am so proud of the fact that she takes ownership in her actions. She seemingly enjoys the attention that I give her, not only when she has accomplished something wonderful, but also when she has made a poor choice, realizes it and wants me to help her figure out how she can do better next time. It makes me feel good that she feels comfortable enough with me to tell me anything, the good and the bad, as I know she needs some guidance along the way.

Prior to being approved for off campus visits, I attended the Epworth basketball games and church services with Tina. This led to several conversations about being a "God girl" (She even has a copy of the book now). Often we have walked up Devine Street to find a place for lunch or to simply window shop. Some of my most favorite days with Tina included window shopping on Devine Street for prom dresses, shoes and checking out artsy furniture. Another of my favorites was when she and I went to a grand opening for a dentist office (a friend of mine). When arriving I thought, "She is going to simply hate this." All the activities were for smaller children: bounce houses, face painting, balloon art. The next thing I knew her entire face was painted like a zebra, she was eating chips and salsa, and she had a huge balloon hat shaped like a palmetto tree with a monkey on top.

r's Heart

She had the most wonderful time, which completely shocked me. Ms. V, her Cottage Parent, rolled on the floor laughing when we arrived back to Epworth. I realized later that Tina probably didn't have an experience such as this as a little girl, and that is why it was such a special day to her.

Slowly I've noticed Tina's language begin to improve, her attitude about herself and life is better and her choice in music is different. She used to jump in my car and she would ask to change the station to something else. Now she asks to listen to one of the bands she heard during Winter Jam. Her spirit is brighter and her clothing choices have also become more lady-like and appropriate. To stand beside her on Easter Sunday as she publicly confirmed her acceptance of Christ was quite a moving moment for me. I have shared with her that her faith and her belief in herself are two things that no one can ever take from her.

Ms. Melton isn't the only one noticing changes in Tina. Pastor Megan Gray, Campus Pastor at Epworth, spends time with Tina each week in her office. "Tina always has a new boyfriend like many 13 year olds will do. It has distracted her from the things she should be focusing on," said Pastor Megan. "But the last two weeks she hasn't had a boyfriend. I am pleased to see this change in her, and I think Ms. Melton is helping with that."

As Tina expressed her embarrassment at being the oldest child to be baptized on Easter Sunday, Ms. Melton looked at her. "Yes, Tina. You are the oldest. But you are setting the example for all the other children, that their faith is important and our relationship with God isn't about age." Tina walked to the front with her head held high and Ms. Melton was right there with her, welcoming her into the Body of Christ as the newest Child of God.





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Children's Home

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Rev. John. E. Holler, Jr.
President

**Children's names have been changed for confidentiality.*

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The mission of Epworth Children's Home is to serve children, youth and families through a caring, accepting and safe Christian community, where hurts are healed; hope is nurtured; and faith in God, self and others is developed.

BBQ Thank You

The 4th Annual Cook-Out-for-Kids sponsored by the Epworth Alumni Association proved to be the best yet! Each year the Alumni continue to grow the event and this year raised more than \$5,000 over last year, with a grand total of more than \$28,000 raised.

Mr. Frank Sharp, who called Epworth home in the 50's and who serves as President of the Association's Board of Directors, said, "I do this because I am trying to return something back to Epworth. I could never repay them." He paused and shook his head, "I'd have to work the rest of my life for free to repay them what they gave me. I have an obligation to stop thinking about myself and think about someone else – think about these children." Frank enjoys the event, although it is a tremendous undertaking. He gets to spend time with his old friends from Epworth; friends he still considers his closest. "We all know our lives would be very different if it weren't for Epworth. Each of us had a chance at an education, and that is priceless," he stated.



Many of the children who currently call Epworth home had an opportunity to visit with Mr. Sharp and other alumni. "I never thought about how old Epworth is and that other children used to live here," said Wayne*, a 15-year-old who volunteered at the event to earn community service hours toward his youth group beach trip this summer. "I'm glad to know I'll be able to come back to Epworth when I am old like them," he continued. The Alumni chuckle at the comment, but understand exactly what Wayne means.

Our thanks to the Epworth Alumni Association and the many volunteers who helped make this an important day: BBQ cookers, Red Hat Honeys, church groups and individuals from across the state. If you would like to learn more about how you can help with next year's event, please contact Mitzie Schafer at 803-256-7394 or mschafer@epworthsc.org.