

# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



Epworth  
Children's Home

*Celebrating 125 Years*



If the walls of Doug Gray Cottage, one of Epworth's cottages that houses young men ages 15-18, could talk, there are hundreds of stories it could share about what has happened over the past year and a half. It goes without saying that the past year has been challenging in new ways for everyone, but for the boys of Doug Gray cottage, the hardship of the past year served as a launchpad for growth. As a group, they focused on learning the value of family and the different ways family can look.

If the walls of Doug Gray could talk, they could tell stories of the family dinners shared together every night, and the laughs, tears, and lessons learned over a plate of spaghetti and meatballs. They would confide that between "Please pass

the butter!" and "Can we have sushi tomorrow?" there were shared fears about next steps and celebrations of all the little wins along the way. With pride they would tell that every Wednesday, a group of teen boys make the decision to turn off their cell phones and put down their video games to be together, be outside, and enjoy a day without the pressures of the world that hide behind a screen. They would share about Saturday morning cottage walks together, to exercise their bodies and their hearts. They would talk about the pranks pulled, the game nights that were a little too competitive, about the tenderness in the air when two of the boys came back from choir practice and performed their songs for their brothers in the cottage.

*Continued on page 3*



## Something Special

Summer 2021

A Message from The Rev. John Holler  
President

Fifteen years as the President and CEO at Epworth Children's Home has passed quickly, but it seems as if I have been here forever. The truth is that I have been connected to Epworth since my birth, or maybe even before that.

My uncle, the Rev. Adlai C. Holler, served on Epworth's Board of Trustees in the 1950's. His father, the Rev. A. E. Holler, helped raise money for the then Epworth Orphanage during its early days. My father Dr. John Holler was the Epworth doctor for thirty years, and my sisters and I grew up on stories about the children of Epworth.

As a pastor in the South Carolina Conference, part of my responsibility was to promote Epworth through the Mother's Day and Work Day offerings.

Later as the Executive Director of the Carolina Pastoral Counseling Service based at Trenholm Road UMC, I and other counselors were able to refer families to Epworth where children and parents could receive some much needed space and assistance while they worked out their problems. Epworth never argued about cost. If children needed help, they received it.

Fifteen years ago, a few weeks after becoming President, I had a walk one Saturday morning down Epworth's main avenue. I had been there just long enough to see the cracks in Epworth's façade and to realize that Epworth needed a good bit of remedial work in order to carry out and sustain the mission it was commissioned for.

Feelings of self-doubt, fear of the unknown, frustrations of having to go back and work on things that I assumed were already in place, and knowing that unpopular decisions had to be made in order to put Epworth on a secure financial footing caused me to secretly ask, "How can I gracefully get out of this?"

My wife Vicki listened patiently to all of my doubts and misgivings for several days. Then one day she said in a most helpful way, "John, why don't you just go there and do what God sent you there to do?"

There it was in plain English. This was not about me. It was not about success and failure or the fear of letting everybody down. It was about serving God in the best way I could with the talents and limitations I had been given.

The past fifteen years have been an amazing time with celebrations and frustrations built into this kind work. I have been fortunate to have felt for a number of years now during my time of ministerial service that, "For this work, I was created". This time at Epworth has underscored these feelings in a wonderful way.

I thank God, Vicki, and all who have served on the Board of Trustees. Also, my gratitude goes to the Rev. Dr. Ted Walter, who served as Interim President for two years before my arrival, and not only held Epworth together, but also began building for Epworth's future. As I close, I am indebted to Epworth's staff members, who in sometimes trying circumstances, gave their all and their best. In addition, many thanks to the Epworth Alumni, who rallied and gave back to the place they call "home".

Finally, I thank the children, who taught us new things on a regular basis and made it extremely rewarding as they found hope and joy.

None of this would have been possible without all who support the children and their caretakers with hours of volunteer work, prayer, financial resources, and job opportunities.

We have laughed, cried, celebrated, grieved, and witnessed anger, hurt and hopelessness. However, above all, we have participated in the miracles of renewed hope, forgiveness, and successes great and small. In addition, we have seen new life with opportunities for productive living, as well as the joy of individuals seeing themselves as royalty with the gifts and graces to break free from the old cycles of trauma and shame that have kept them captive to the past.

It is true that everyone is a miracle. Sometimes miracles need a little assistance and a helping of patience to be revealed.

If the walls could talk, they would tell a story about Sean\*, a high school senior who was struggling with public speaking, social skills, and self-confidence, but felt so safe with his people, that he decided to start leading the cottage devotionals. By the end of the year, Sean had grown from a nervous boy to a confident young man standing proudly in front of a group of his peers sharing and facilitating conversation around what the Lord is teaching him. Sean was able to translate his newfound leadership skills into a new job in his career field. When he was accepted into college and Epworth's Independent Living Program, the same group that had so patiently walked alongside his growth and cheered him on then helped carry his bags to the car and into his next phase of life.

While there would be too many funny stories to recount and many moments of silliness to remember, if the walls of Doug Gray cottage could talk, they would really reminisce telling how the boys felt safe, accepted, and loved and how staff is transparent, and honest, loving the boys unconditionally. They would whisper how the Doug Gray family was there for each other, on the best days and on the worst ones. They would beam over how love being cultivated benefits not only the boys of Doug Gray, but also future generations of their families. They would tell you about the Sunday morning services listened to and all the lessons learned on what growing into manhood means.

Cottage Coordinator Faye Jones can tell us of the tremendous growth that this cottage has experienced over the last year. She reminds us that there is no shortage of difficult things that has happened to the children at Epworth, that the boys of Doug Gray walked into that cottage with bags of hurt, loss, and struggles. But they are resilient. They are fighters. And even more than that, they are children of God who are fighting for growth and a better life, together, thanks to the pandemic. When discussing where God is in the really hard parts of life, Aaron\* in Doug Gray said it best. "It's easy to find God in the really bad stuff. God is in the forgiveness".

If the walls of Doug Gray would talk, they would tell that hurts are being healed and hope is being nurtured at Epworth. Every single day.

## Thank you for Caring

The steps toward maturity are by definition immature", I once read.

After Amy's mother abandoned her at a homeless shelter during the pandemic, Amy moved into the Independent Living Center and had a difficult adjustment.

As her first tumultuous week ended on Friday afternoon and the cottage was quiet, I spoke to her briefly. "Amy, when we see each other again next week, the past will be the past. We will move forward with your school plans and all your other goals".

She nodded, lowered her eyes and slipped away around the corner. A second later a voice barely above a whisper called my name. "Mrs. Brandes, thank you for caring so much".

About six weeks later, Amy had to pick up some prescriptions. We teach life skills on the use of pharmacies, so I let her go in alone. After waiting a bit, I became concerned that maybe she was having trouble or needed money. I went into the store and heard that quiet voice again, " You came to check on me".

When we returned with the medication, she was resistant to taking the pills and had trouble swallowing them. I told her I taught my kids to swallow pills with chocolate candies so maybe that is what we needed to do. Before I could head to the store, I distributed the residents' mail. Amy came running across the dining room and handed me a paper:

It was her college acceptance letter.

I wish I could say that we all lived happily ever after, but that is not reality for any of us. With foster youth especially, the growth process is two steps forward and one step back.

Amy however is now finishing her first semester of college, employed, and recently received her SC driving permit. We celebrated all these steps forward with, of course, chocolate candies.



# Investing in Care!

2020 \$10,000+ Congregational Supporters		
Rehoboth UMC	Columbia	\$105,305.00
Mt Horeb UMC	Lexington	\$76,210.00
Shandon UMC	Columbia	\$42,909.00
Trenholm Road UMC	Columbia	\$35,271.00
Chapin UMC	Chapin	\$31,545.00
Central UMC	Florence	\$30,477.00
First UMC	Isle of Palms	\$30,240.00
Buncombe Street UMC	Greenville	\$29,370.98
Union UMC	Cope	\$27,200.00
St Johns UMC	Aiken	\$26,189.00
Manning UMC	Manning	\$25,165.00
Pond Branch UMC	Gilbert	\$23,585.00
Bethany UMC	Summerville	\$23,371.80
Advent UMC	Simpsonville	\$22,053.00
Union UMC	Irmo	\$21,703.53
Grace UMC	North Augusta	\$21,242.50
Reidville Road UMC	Moore	\$20,618.10
Belin Memorial UMC	Murrells Inlet	\$19,397.00
Washington Street UMC	Columbia	\$19,279.00
St Andrew by the Sea UMC	Hilton Head Island	\$19,000.00
Mauldin UMC	Mauldin	\$17,946.76
Macedonia UMC	Mullins	\$17,796.00
Sharon UMC	Greer	\$17,315.11
Covenant UMC	Greer	\$17,137.00
St Johns UMC	Rock Hill	\$15,959.00
Carteret Street UMC	Beaufort	\$15,683.00
Lyttleton Street UMC	Camden	\$15,285.00
Ashland UMC	Columbia	\$14,623.01
St Andrews Parish UMC	Charleston	\$14,205.75
Shady Grove UMC	Cameron	\$14,204.00
First UMC	Myrtle Beach	\$12,650.00
Gramling UMC	Gramling	\$12,005.50
Aldersgate UMC	Greenville	\$11,908.67
St Luke UMC	Hartsville	\$11,649.00
Dickson Memorial UMC	Townville	\$11,380.00
Lyman UMC	Lyman	\$11,294.00
St Johns UMC	Lugoff	\$10,788.00
Mt Hebron UMC	West Columbia	\$10,779.96
First UMC	Marion	\$10,684.93
Edisto Island UMC	Edisto Island	\$10,200.33

2020 Highest Per Member Giving by District (599 or Less Members)				
District	Church Name	Total Gifts	Members	\$/Member
Anderson	Ebenezer UMC	\$5,810.00	22	\$264.09
	Zion UMC	\$820.00	5	\$164.00
	Dickson Memorial UMC	\$11,380.00	132	\$86.21
Charleston	Edisto Island UMC	\$10,200.33	78	\$130.77
	Eccles UMC	\$1,850.00	35	\$52.86
	First UMC	\$30,240.00	578	\$52.32
Columbia	Rehoboth UMC	\$105,305.00	155	\$679.39
	Pond Branch UMC	\$23,585.00	301	\$78.36
	Beulah UMC	\$3,905.00	84	\$46.49
Florence	Andrews Chapel UMC	\$4,245.00	23	\$184.57
	Scranton UMC	\$4,750.00	51	\$93.14
	Union UMC	\$5,565.00	108	\$51.53
Greenville	Pisgah UMC	\$6,085.00	75	\$81.13
	Sharon UMC	\$17,315.11	344	\$50.33
	Bethel UMC	\$2,400.00	49	\$48.98
Greenwood	Ridge Spring UMC	\$1,087.50	13	\$83.65
	Spann UMC	\$1,405.00	18	\$78.06
	Ebenezer UMC	\$2,908.42	57	\$51.02
Hartsville	McLeod Chapel UMC	\$2,225.00	54	\$41.20
	Bethel UMC	\$2,370.00	82	\$28.90
	Zoar UMC	\$480.00	22	\$21.82
Marion	Boykin UMC	\$5,220.00	41	\$127.32
	Oak Grove UMC	\$4,000.00	55	\$72.73
	Zoan UMC	\$3,875.00	55	\$70.45
Orangeburg	Union UMC	\$27,200.00	55	\$494.55
	Shady Grove UMC	\$14,204.00	56	\$253.64
	Springfield UMC	\$2,090.00	24	\$87.08
Rock Hill	St Paul UMC	\$5,550.00	211	\$26.30
	Antioch UMC	\$2,475.00	108	\$22.92
	Shady Grove UMC	\$500.00	22	\$22.73
Spartanburg	White Stone UMC	\$2,165.00	26	\$83.27
	Roebuck UMC	\$4,541.00	79	\$57.48
	Reidville Road UMC	\$20,618.10	442	\$46.65
Walterboro	Green Pond UMC	\$7,050.00	50	\$141.00
	Mt Tabor UMC	\$3,325.00	27	\$123.15
	Trinity UMC	\$5,710.00	111	\$51.44

## The Center for Independent Living

Independent Living served a record high number of clients in 2020 at 21 clients served in residence at the IL Center.

We continued to take admissions during the pandemic.

Clients earned college credits, General Education Diplomas, car awards, vocational certifications, and military assignments. We had clients graduate from basic and advanced military training. One aftercare client earned her associates degree.

## 2020 Highest Per Member Giving by District (600 or Higher Members)

District	Church Name	Total Gifts	Members	\$/Member
Anderson	Trinity UMC	\$7,043.00	745	\$9.45
	Clemson UMC	\$7,915.87	1042	\$7.60
	St Johns UMC	\$9,887.00	1361	\$7.26
Charleston	Bethel UMC	\$9,007.00	749	\$12.03
	John Wesley UMC	\$9,432.78	1224	\$7.71
	Bethany UMC	\$23,371.80	3512	\$6.65
Columbia	Washington Street UMC	\$19,279.00	877	\$21.98
	Trenholm Road UMC	\$35,271.00	1677	\$21.03
	Ashland UMC	\$14,623.01	743	\$19.68
Florence	Central UMC	\$30,477.00	1918	\$15.89
Greenville	Buncombe Street UMC	\$29,370.98	2457	\$11.95
	Mauldin UMC	\$17,946.76	1516	\$11.84
	Memorial UMC	\$6,260.00	655	\$9.56
Greenwood	Grace UMC	\$21,242.50	1738	\$12.22
	Main Street UMC	\$8,484.63	915	\$9.27
	Central UMC	\$3,523.00	610	\$5.78
Hartsville	St Johns UMC	\$10,788.00	619	\$17.43
	Lyttleton Street UMC	\$15,285.00	952	\$16.06
	St Luke UMC	\$11,649.00	1127	\$10.34
Marion	First UMC	\$12,650.00	1185	\$10.68
	Trinity UMC	\$7,391.98	706	\$10.47
	Trinity UMC	\$6,330.00	611	\$10.36
Orangeburg	St Johns UMC	\$26,189.00	2129	\$12.30
Rock Hill	Pleasant Hill UMC	\$6,105.00	725	\$8.42
	St Johns UMC	\$15,959.00	2077	\$7.68
	Woodland UMC	\$3,765.00	902	\$4.17
Spartanburg	Lyman UMC	\$11,294.00	712	\$15.86
	Bethel UMC	\$2,955.00	1247	\$2.37
Walterboro	St Andrew by the Sea UMC	\$19,000.00	619	\$30.69
	Bluffton UMC	\$7,151.00	682	\$10.49
	St George UMC	\$1,750.00	654	\$2.68

## 2020 Highest Congregation Giving by Total Dollars by District

Anderson	Dickson Memorial UMC	\$11,380.00
	St Johns UMC	\$9,887.00
	Clemson UMC	\$7,915.87
Charleston	First UMC	\$30,240.00
	Bethany UMC	\$23,371.80
	St Andrews Parish UMC	\$14,205.75
Columbia	Rehoboth UMC	\$105,305.00
	Mt Horeb UMC	\$76,210.00
	Shandon UMC	\$42,909.00
Florence	Central UMC	\$30,477.00
	Manning UMC	\$25,165.00
	Ebenezer UMC	\$7,192.00
Greenville	Buncombe Street UMC	\$29,370.98
	Advent UMC	\$22,053.00
	Mauldin UMC	\$17,946.76
Greenwood	Grace UMC	\$21,242.50
	St Johns UMC	\$8,875.00
	Main Street UMC	\$8,484.63
Hartsville	Lyttleton Street UMC	\$15,285.00
	St Luke UMC	\$11,649.00
	St Johns UMC	\$10,788.00
Marion	Belin Memorial UMC	\$19,397.00
	Macedonia UMC	\$17,796.00
	First UMC	\$12,650.00
Orangeburg	Union UMC	\$27,200.00
	St Johns UMC	\$26,189.00
	Shady Grove UMC	\$14,204.00
Rock Hill	St Johns UMC	\$15,959.00
	Pleasant Hill UMC	\$6,105.00
	St Paul UMC	\$5,550.00
Spartanburg	Reidville Road UMC	\$20,618.10
	Gramling UMC	\$12,005.50
	Lyman UMC	\$11,294.00
Walterboro	St Andrew by the Sea UMC	\$19,000.00
	Carteret Street UMC	\$15,683.00
	Bethel UMC	\$8,990.00

## 2020 Number of Churches by District that Gave \$0

District	Total	District	Total
Anderson	21	Hartsville	39
Charleston	26	Marion	34
Columbia	10	Orangeburg	22
Florence	42	Rock Hill	15
Greenville	21	Spartanburg	17
Greenwood	16	Walterboro	42
Total			305

# Thank You, Rev. Holler



For fifteen years, he's been a familiar sight: the tall, slender man walking across the Epworth Children's Home campus, stopping to talk with everyone he meets. He often can be seen patting a shoulder, engaging in an extended conversation, or laughing at a story he had just heard. His interest in Epworth's residents and staff is never-flagging, and he is beloved at Epworth for his love, his leadership, his wisdom, and his warm, compassionate approach to life.

Most of the residents and perhaps some of the staff do not realize that the special man they call their leader is also a consistent advocate in changing and improving child and family wellbeing in our state. They might not realize that he has served on governing boards, helped shape legislation, met with state and local officials, and created strategies and plans – all to improve the lives of South Carolina's underserved children and their families. His legacy is prodigious.

This man is, of course, Reverend John Holler, Epworth's President and Chief Executive Officer for the past fifteen years. As we celebrate his retirement, all who call Epworth their home, all who receive its multiple services, all who learn and grow in its programs, and certainly all who work here, have come to realize how much they will miss his presence, his warm smile, his insight, his wise thinking, his counseling, his corny jokes, and in general, Reverend Holler's imprint on their lives.

Reverend Holler's list of accomplishments and accolades is long and distinguished. From leadership positions in the United Methodist Church to child and family wellbeing organizations, he has worked with legislators and other officials in advisory capacities and collaborated with state agencies and other governmental entities in helping to establish sound practices for child and family welfare in our state. Reverend Holler not only brought the best of his career and experience to guide Epworth during the fifteen years of his tenure there.



One of Reverend Holler's most important contributions to Epworth's present and future is the establishment of the Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, a concept he developed and nurtured into a reality. With the changes made in regulations and requirements for residential homes like Epworth, Reverend Holler realized that in addition to maintaining the excellence of service to the children who call Epworth their home, there was also a need to expand Epworth's mission into programs and services that could minister to underserved children and families across the state. Out of this vision, the Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing was born.

Today, the Institute consists of several centers of excellence that originate, develop, and bring services to those in need. The Institute works to aid in the improvement of outcomes for children and families in South Carolina as they move toward safety, stability and wellbeing.

In addition to Reverend Holler's insightful leadership that addresses the needs of children and families statewide, his primary focus during his fifteen-year tenure at Epworth has been the safety, prosperity, and wellbeing of the children and older youth who live on Epworth's campus. Throughout his tenure at Epworth, Reverend Holler has maintained a warm, compassionate, and welcoming relationship with Epworth's residents. With an office door open to residents most of the time, and with an ear and a heart always willing to listen and offer advice, Reverend John Holler is a much-beloved figure. Although he could provide "tough love" when needed, Epworth's residents have always looked to him as an advisor, and sometimes almost like a member of their families. He has enriched the lives of countless numbers of Epworth's children.

Although Reverend Holler has been honored in the last few weeks by receiving our state's highest civilian award, The Order of the Palmetto, from Governor McMaster, and having John Holler Day proclaimed by Columbia mayor Steve Benjamin, the most special honors and commendations come from all of us who have worked with Reverend John Holler over the years, and have come to appreciate his spirit, his wisdom, his insight, and his compassion. Our lives are much better to have had the pleasure of his company.

## *Meet Beth Williams, Epworth's New President*

Epworth is pleased to introduce Beth Williams, the new President and Chief Executive Officer. Beth is an exceptional professional in the child welfare industry, with a rich history of advocating for and serving vulnerable children. Epworth has grown and thrived under her leadership as Chief Operating Officer for the past three years.

Beth has been able to operationalize the vision of Rev. John Holler and the Board of Trustees for The Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing by "standing up" new Centers of Excellence. The Center for Foster Family Engagement has secured funding from The Duke Endowment and has grown exponentially in the last year. It is but one example of how Beth has promoted direct engagement with the Methodist Conference and local churches to support Epworth's mission and vision.

During her tenure at The Bair Foundation and Miracle Hill Ministries, Beth used her talents and relationships to grow both organizations and to improve programmatic effectiveness and quality. Growth and quality are cornerstones for how she approaches her work. While at Epworth Children's Home, Beth has made significant strides in moving the organization along a path toward diversification of its service array. This approach benefits children and families in so many ways as we all move toward preserving families and assuring that children have permanency.

Beth is a person of faith who uses that faith to drive her view of the work that must be done for children and families. Her faith is the largest part of her value system, and she uses her faith-based belief system not only as an overarching framework for management and operational activities, but also for how she provides day-to-day supervision to her team. Character and integrity with program management, agency partnerships, and personal relationships is a driver for her work. She has extensive experience integrating her faith into her everyday work as she has spent over 20 years of her career working for faith-based organizations.

Beth is a member of the Village church where she also volunteers. During her down time she enjoys golf and reading. Beth is married to Bob Williams, and together they have one daughter, Emily, a recent graduate of Clemson University, and two cats. Epworth is ecstatic to continue to grow under Beth's leadership.



## *Foundations for the Future*

Barbara Eveyln Jeter loved people, especially children. Although she had no children of her own, she chose a life in which she would be surrounded by them, sharing in their innate creativity and love of life. As a young woman, Barbara was an accomplished pianist with a bright future in the world of music. She chose instead to follow in her parents' footsteps and become an educator. She received a bachelor's degree from Winthrop College, and she made a career as an elementary school teacher, first in New Jersey and later in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she served as an educator for thirty years.

Barbara adored the children in her classroom, and she shared stories of their vibrancy and curiosity with her friends and family in a way that showed how deeply she cared for them. She was every parent's dream teacher—a firm but compassionate disciplinarian who provided structure and rigor to those who needed it most. In addition to her beloved pupils, Barbara enjoyed family time with her niece and nephews, teaching them to read, solve math problems, enjoy time in nature, and appreciate good sportsmanship. In addition to classroom subjects, she shared her knowledge of everything from square dancing to tennis with the children in her family and at school.

In her retirement, Barbara got to know the next generation of children in her family—her great nieces and nephew—who adoringly called her Bebe. She taught them to live life to its fullest, with appreciation for everything along the way. She showed them that the best gifts in life are the simple daily blessings, such as a meal and conversation shared with loved ones. She treasured books and modeled a love of reading for everyone she encountered. Barbara had a profound gratitude for God's perfect creation in the natural world, as evidenced by her appreciation of the beauty of the full moon over the ocean.

Barbara's gift to Epworth is the culmination of a life of frugality and generosity. She served the Lord the best way she knew how, by giving the gift of her time to the young people who needed her guidance. She touched more lives than she could ever fathom, and thanks to her vision and caring, children will continue to thrive because of her care.



For more information on making a legacy gift through your estate plans, please contact Lisa Livingston Fusco at [lfusco@epworthsc.org](mailto:lfusco@epworthsc.org) or 803-256-7394.





**Epworth**  
Children's Home

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[www.epworthchildrenshome.org](http://www.epworthchildrenshome.org)

Beth Williams  
President

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*\*Children's names and pictures have been changed for confidentiality.*

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

## *Graduation Celebration*

Epworth Children's Home is proud to celebrate a 100% graduation rate for the 9th year in a row! This year Epworth celebrates 5 seniors who all graduated from Dreher High School! One graduate has plans to attend Coastal Carolina in the fall, three plan to attend Midlands Technical College in the fall, three are moving into Epworth's Independent Living Program, and one is entering the workforce! We are so proud of all our graduates and we cannot wait to see all that they accomplish!



**Congratulations to former president, Rev. Charles Hutchins, for being awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Tusculum University.**

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