

## **Church dedicates home for boys**

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DENTON A youth campus in rural Caroline County for up to 16 boys ages 12 to 18 years was dedicated Friday afternoon by the Board of Child Care of the United Methodist Church Inc.

To those involved in seeing the project overcome negative public opinion among local residents and become a reality, it was a great day "this is the day that the Lord has made ... Let's revel in it!" said one guest speaker and an afternoon that represented promise for a better future for the youths who will live there.

Several speakers promised that the 117-acre facility built on a farm meadow would become a place where "lost" youths might have a better future.

Thomas Curcio, president and CEO of the Board of Child Care and master of ceremonies for the day, shared a statistic he said illustrated why such a campus was needed here.

"There are currently 10 boys housed in my (BCC) Baltimore facility who are from the Eastern Shore. These boys, had this facility already been built, might have wound up here, closer to their own homes instead of so far away from where they grew up," Curcio said.

Curcio promised that boys from the Shore housed elsewhere would be given strong consideration for transfer to the Caroline County youth campus, which will formally open Dec. 1. From its conception, the home was seen as a place to house children from the Mid-Shore and Lower Shore.

"It's exciting to think we'll now have a presence on the Eastern Shore for boys," said Curcio. "As I have said before, it is our intention to integrate ourselves into the community and to have our (residents) become a contributing part of the community. It's been a tough road the last 16, 17 months, but it is the end result that matters."

Mike Clark, director of Queen Anne's County Local Management Board and a representative of the Wicomico Partnership for Families and Children, was the keynote speaker. He said the youths to be housed here are the victims, whether they have been taken from their natural homes because they had been the victim of abuse or neglect, came from a home where there was been substance abuse by the parents or been traumatized by their home surroundings, and that they have likely run away from previous placements in the foster care system.

Clark added that 60 percent of troubled teens put in foster care here were placed outside the Shore.

"Children will do better in an environment closer to where they lived," he said, saying that the goal of having a youth foster care campus on the Eastern Shore was to make it easier to achieve "the ultimate goal of bringing kids into a happier life."

Julie Wernz, chairman of the Board of Directors for the Board of Child Care, said it was a special day to celebrate.

"This is the day that the Lord has made ... Let's revel in it!" she said.

Several members of the clergy also spoke, including Bishop Peggy Johnson, head of the Peninsula Delaware Conference of the United Methodist Church, and Bishop Violet Fisher of Denton.

"Bring our people home ... bring them back to the Eastern Shore," said Johnson. "This (facility) was built through the desire to bring love to the children who come here."

Fisher said she was "excited this is a reality," then read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, as the prayer of dedication.

The Rev. Earle Baker, who joked of having "been a lifelong Methodist as well as a resident of Denton," prayed that "this will be a place where love is ... and where lives will be transformed."

He prayed, as well, that the facility might become a place where a child could find a "new beginning."

Denton Town Commissioner Conway Gregory and Dina Daly, director of the Caroline County Department of Social Services, also attended the dedication.

"It has been a long road. I am glad that the Board of Child Care has been so dedicated and committed to being here," Daly said. "It's been proven that the farther away a child is from its home, the less chance the families will become involved again ..., and the longer the odds are for the child (successfully returning back to a happy living arrangement)."

Daly added that youths living at the facility are not juvenile delinquents or teenage criminals with rap sheets. Rather, she said, they are teens who have been taken from their homes "through no fault of their own" who have had trouble being assimilated through regular foster care channels.

"These children come to us suffering from trauma, through no fault of their own," Daly added. "I know firsthand the kind of work they (BBC) do, the commitment they make to these children. I will continue to do what I do, advocate for children and to work for the (success) of the BCC in its goal."

"This might be the first one (on the Eastern Shore), but it won't be the last," Daly said.