

No Growing Pains Here

Edenton United Methodist Church dedicated its newly completed building expansion at its annual Homecoming on Sunday, October 8, 2006. Festivities included preaching by former District Superintendent Rev. Kermit Braswell and consecration of the new facilities by current District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Won Seok Namkoong. But this particular celebration was about far more than an annual occasion to visit with old friends.

It is no secret that Edenton and the surrounding area are experiencing a boom in population growth. Yet, critics doubted the wisdom of a small-town church with a relatively small congregation attempting to expand to more than double its size in a community that already has over thirty different houses of worship within a twenty mile radius. Undeterred, Edenton UMC planned its facilities expansion over three years ago, and people everywhere are taking notice of its success.

David Peele, Building Committee Chairman, said that Edenton UMC has been approached by several area churches with dreams of expanding their own facilities and ministries. "We have had representatives from churches as far away as Washington coming to EUMC to see how we made it all happen." Mr. Peele emphasizes to all who wish to follow EUMC's lead that they recognize the fact that "congregations support a vision of growing ministries and will provide the financial support to make expansions such as ours happen. Our Celebration of Faith campaign began three years ago with vision and courage, and to date, we are ahead of our financial goals as we complete this first phase."

Ministry and outreach programs, many of which are under the direction of leaders with professional skills, have already expanded to fill the new wings and Family Life Center. The Ark Day Care program offers care for infants through pre-school as well as an after-school program for elementary students. A new, large youth room houses an active Sunday evening Youth Fellowship meeting that averages 25 teens between sixth and twelfth grades. The Albemarle Chorale rehearses and performs here, Chowan Hospital holds meetings and events here, and Edenton UMC also provides meeting space for AA and Al-Anon meetings six days a week. Language Bridges, an ESL and advocacy program reaching out to a mainly Hispanic population, meets weekly under the direction of retired speech pathologists and school teachers.

Since opening the doors of its new spaces, the church has hosted large wedding and funeral receptions, concerts, dinners, a score of community and Church meetings, blood drives, and the upcoming Youth Lock-In for area Methodist teens from as far away as the Outer Banks. In addition to a large commercial kitchen, the Family Life Center boasts a stage and state-of-the-art sound system. On Wednesday nights at 6:00 pm, the Church opens its doors for a fellowship supper in the Family Life Center to welcome friends, neighbors, and newcomers looking for a church home. A free-will offering is taken at the door to cover meal expenses.

The expansion of facilities and the growing list of community activities hosted at Edenton UMC are making the Church stand out as a flagship within the community as well as within its governing District. The Elizabeth City District of the United Methodist Church encompasses all of the counties surrounding the Albemarle Sound, north to the Virginia border, west to Bertie County, east to the Outer Banks, and south to Hatteras.

The Church is proud to be District Superintendent Namkoong's unofficial "go-to" facility for hosting various large meetings for its District. Pastor Jim Huskins said that the recent installation service for Rev. Namkoong's superintendency is something he is personally very proud of. But he added, "We do not take our growing prominence lightly or for granted. Our congregation has chosen to place a high priority on excellence in setting a Christian example of hospitality and service within our community. That comes from a commitment from the people of our congregation first and foremost. Simply having this large space would mean nothing if all it did were collect cobwebs or be used merely as our own private country club. We believe that the Lord wants us to actively seek ways of reaching out and ministering to the needs of others through this facility, and we believe that that is why our expansion has been so incredibly blessed."

Edenton United Methodist Church is located at the corner of Virginia Road and Luke Street, next to Chowan Hospital. Worship services are 9:00 am and 11:00 am on Sunday mornings and Christian Education classes for nursery through adults are held in the Education Wing at 10:00 am. Their website showcasing the many programs and a calendar of upcoming events is located at www.edentonumc.org.

If you do not have web access, call the Church's Program Coordinator, Suzanne Ryan, at 482-3269 x205 to request a copy of the monthly calendar and a ministry profile containing information about the ongoing Christian Life Programs at Edenton UMC.