

Peebles

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show the abused that there is a way out.

"Once you have been delivered from a life of abuse, you can see it in others," said Peebles, who often uses her own story as both a cautionary tale and a guidebook. "We want to be a confidant and walk (abused people) through the process."

One of the main components of Alabaster Place – a name derived from the story in Luke about the woman who is healed and made whole again by Jesus after she breaks her Alabaster box of ointment – is its focus on the church. The ministry has trained more than a dozen advocates to offer assistance to church-attending victims of abuse. For obvious reasons, advocates work with victims – many of whom are still in the abusive relationship – in the strictest of confidence. Advocates are trained to restrain from telling abuse victims to outright leave their abusive relationships. Peebles concedes that it is hard for her and her team of volunteer advocates to hold their tongues, but she believes that telling them what to do and how to do it makes abused people even more powerless.

"If we did that, then we are taking the control from them," she said. "We want to guide them so that they can make the best decisions for themselves."

The success of Alabaster Place has been great, so much so that Peebles is often invited to lecture and lead workshops at state and federal conferences. The ministry will soon begin a partnership with a federal anti-domestic violence initiative. On Saturday, June 26, Alabaster Place will use its Fifth Anniversary Celebration to not only lift up the name of God but to honor its volunteer advocates and those who have overcome abuse.

Latisha Stuckey is one of the many Alabaster Place advocates who were once victims of abuse. She credits the ministry for helping her to escape an abusive marriage. Stuckey says she can identify with the women that she is now charged with guiding; their stories were once her tale. But she had a happy ending; she wants the same for others.

"I tell them that 'I went through

this, so that you don't have to go through it,'" said Stuckey.

Although the vast majority of the victims assisted by Alabaster Place are female, Peebles knows that domestic violence can be a two-way street.

"Fifteen percent of victims are men," she said, citing a national statistic.

Reuben West is one of Alabaster Place's rare male advocates. He is currently working with a male abuse victim and is quick to point out that just because the public rarely hears about male victims doesn't mean that they don't exist.

West, a survivor of harsh childhood verbal abuse, is saddened and sometimes shocked by the stories of abuse that he hears. He is old school and believes that a man is never justified in laying his hands on a woman.

"There is just no excuse," he said. "You can always just walk away from a confrontation."

The perception that the black church is reluctant to address the subject of domestic violence is not entirely accurate, Peebles says. She was embraced warmly by her pastor, Greater Cleveland Avenue Christian Church's Bishop Sheldon McCarter, when Peebles, an Elder at the church, told him of her vision for Alabaster Place. The ministry is based out of Greater Cleveland's former building on Cleveland Avenue.

Peebles believes that the mistake that some faith-based initiatives and agencies make is that they foster a sense of victimhood within those who have been abused.

"They leave the same way they came in (feeling like a victim)," said Peebles.

Alabaster Place's mission of making abused people feel empowered and as if they have control is the only true road to healing and out of the shadows of abuse, says Peebles.

The June 26 celebration, "A Night with the King," will be held from 6 - 8 p.m. at Spencer Memorial Christian Church, 3894 N. Hampton Drive. Those who have overcome abuse and would like to attend should call 336-764-5133 to register by June 18. For more information about Alabaster Place, go to www.alabasterplace-inc.org; call the number above; or email Elder Peebles at alabasterplace@gmail.com.



Photos by Layla Farmer

Scholarship winners (from left) Ryan Harris, Chelsea Hosch, Mariah Fulton and LaVon Harley stand near their parents.

Ministers award scholarships

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Representatives from the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity gathered at Mt. Zion Baptist Church Monday to celebrate a group of teenagers who are preparing to embark on the next chapter in their lives.

Six recent high school graduates were honored this year with the Ministers Conference's Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Seed Fund Scholarships. The 2010 recipients joined the ranks of dozens of students who have sought higher education with the help of the Conference since the program's inception more than 25 years ago, said Dr. Serenus Churn, head of the Conference's Scholarship Committee and the pastor of Mt. Zion.

The group has awarded more than \$125,000 in scholarships, he added. "You're joining a very rich legacy," Churn told the teens. "We have had persons who have stood where you are standing and they have gone on to be very successful ... I think it's important that you understand that you are part of that legacy."

Students were selected for the \$1,000 scholarships based on recommendations from school administrators, pastors and other community leaders, in addition to several other qualifications, including community involvement and service. Churn said.

Each student receives \$500 at the beginning of the fall semester and \$500 upon their successful completion of it, said Churn. The money is derived from the proceeds of the Conference's annual MLK Day celebration, and from donations made by church members and the pastors' themselves, he explained.

"The scholarship has two purposes," Churn stated. "The first and perhaps the most noteworthy is to encourage our young people to pursue their education beyond the high school level. The second is to give some assistance as they enter the college situation."

Four of the 2010 recipients – Mariah Fulton, LaVon Harley, Ryan Harris and Chelsea Hosch – were on hand Monday to accept their awards in person.

Harris, an alumnus of North Davidson High School, has enrolled at UNC-Charlotte, where he plans to study computer engineering. A life-long member of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Ryan said having the support of his local community has bolstered his confidence as a soon-to-be college student.

"It feels good because my dad and Emmanuel (a Ministers Conference participant) backed me up," said the 17 year-old. "Even though I have some support, I needed the help."

Ryan's father, Weldon Harris, a member of the IT Department at

Truliant Federal Credit Union, said he was also thankful for the additional funds.

"I'm overjoyed. I'm glad the opportunity was given to him," he said of his son. "It's very great. We're blessed to be able to get that support."

Scholarship recipient Mariah Fulton has unique ties to the Ministers Conference. Her father, Bishop Todd Fulton, is a member. Fulton, 18, plans to attend Elizabeth City State University in the fall, where she will study elementary education. Her dream is to someday return to the Twin City and open her own Christian-focused daycare center.

"I love kids. I've always loved being around kids," said Fulton, who also works with the youth program at her father's church, Mt. Moriah Outreach Center in Kernersville.

Hosch, a Parkland alumna, will study computer science at Wake Forest University. Harley, who graduated from Reynolds on Saturday, is going to N.C. A&T to study nursing.

Churn's parting words to the students drove home the nature of the program's vision.

"We see in you great gifts and possibilities. We know that God has blessed you with the ability to do whatever you need to do to be successful in life," he said. "...We count you as our investment in the 21st Century. You are our (ambassadors). As we give to you today, we look forward. As you grow and as you become successful, you will give back to others, you will pay it forward."



Dr. Churn

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