

Teen Mothers Find Refuge at Faith-Based, Live-In Girls Home

Ohio pastor Darlene Bishop said the \$1.5 million Home for Life is a response to a burden she has carried for 17 years

When a 15-year-old girl in Ohio discovered she was pregnant, she didn't rush to the nearest women's clinic to abort her unborn child. Instead she turned to a newly built, faith-based residential facility for unwed, pregnant teens.

The Darlene Bishop Home for Life in Monroe, Ohio, opened in July and offers teenage expectant moms an alternative to abortion. "Society says it's acceptable to have an abortion," said Bishop, who co-pastors the charismatic Solid Rock Church with her husband, Lawrence. "Young girls seldom get the truth."

The 23,000-square-foot facility offers off-site, professional prenatal care, career and health education, computer training, an anger management course and a home-school program—all directed by a team of Christian staff and volunteers.

Amanda Burns, who is seven months pregnant, heard about the home through a Girl Scout leader. "I was thinking about abortion because I knew my baby would be in heaven and not in pain," the 16-year-old reasoned. But after visiting the home, the Hamilton, Ohio, resident changed her mind because she "didn't want to be a murderer."

It took the church four years of legal wrangling and \$100,000 in court and attorney fees to break ground on the \$1.5 million

home, which is a ministry of the church.

City officials claimed the church's surrounding property was not zoned for a residential facility, but lawyers for the church argued otherwise. "The church didn't need approval to erect a building on its own property," said Ron Carter, an administrator for the church. "It already had the proper license to expand."

When a lower court ruled in favor of the church, city leaders continued to appeal the case. Solid Rock Church eventually appealed to the Ohio Supreme Court. Church officials are convinced that "God worked it out" because the court refused to hear the case, making it possible for the church to proceed with its initial plans.

According to the National Vital Statistics Report of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fewer teenagers are becoming mothers. The birthrate for U.S. teens declined steadily throughout the 1990s, falling from 62.1 births per 1,000 teenagers 15 to 19 years old in 1991 to 48.5 in 2000, the report said.

However, Camille Peay of Columbia, S.C., who teaches teens through her Bottles and Bookbags ministry how to care for their children, said churches must continue efforts to reach teens because the report does not show how many girls had abortions instead of carrying their babies to term.

Bishop, who is a popular conference speaker, isn't waiting for others to do what has been her burden for the last 17 years. Bishop said she donates "every penny" of her honorariums to

the two-story, “state-of-the-art” home.

“I have a heart for these girls, and I don’t want to see any of them fall through society’s cracks. That’s why I opened a home,” she told Charisma.

The Home for Life currently houses eight moms-to-be but has enough room to accommodate 32 girls. Pregnant teens interested in participating in the ministry can apply by completing a brief application and a telephone interview.

All of the girls’ food, education and living expenses are provided free of charge. Medical expenses, however, are the responsibility of the applicant, her parents or a legal guardian. Those without health insurance can apply for assistance through a local county agency.

Beth Ward, program director for the home and a member of Solid Rock Church, said the ministry is eager to help teenagers make positive decisions for themselves and their babies. “Girls from across the country can apply to come here. It doesn’t matter what religion, race or background they come from, we want to help,” Ward explained.

Moms currently living in the home say it’s “a blessing” for their unborn babies. Grateful to live in a place that has “no stress or tension,” Burns explained: “I’m no longer surrounded by my friends and influences that lead to bad decisions. God’s love is here.”

Valerie G. Lowe

For more information about the Darlene Bishop Home for Life, write P. O. Box 700, Monroe, OH 45050; visit [www.homeforlife.org](#); or call

513-423-LIFE. To reach Camille Peay of Bottles and Bookbags,
e-mail her at mjpeay@.