

# Hope for homeless youth



From left, Chelsea, J.C., founder Denise Burry, holding A'Niyah, and Lakesha pose in front of one of the houses on the church's property that will be donated to Forward Paths by First United Methodist Church in Eustis. [LINDA FLOREA/CORRESPONDENT]

## Forward Paths on track to receive property for housing

By Linda Florea  
Correspondent

First United Methodist Church in Eustis is planning to donate over an acre of property with two houses on it to Forward Paths, a non-profit charity that works with homeless youth and those that age out of foster care, for housing their clients.

Pastor Chris Hayden said when the land was acquired years ago, there were plans to put it to use.

Originally built at a different location in 1881, the church was moved to the current campus on Grove Street in the 1950s. In its heyday in the 1960s, it had an average of 1,200 worshippers per week.

However, with a decline in church membership and monetary resources, they could



From left, Director of Student Development Cristy Orpurt, holding J.C., Merceydie with A'Niyah, Nishae and founder Denise Burry stand in front of the Forward Paths office at Morrison United Methodist Church. [LINDA FLOREA/CORRESPONDENT]

not bring the land's purpose to fruition. Currently, one house on the property is rented and the other is used for storage.

Hayden said the idea of ending childhood homelessness in Lake County was a mission of the church before

the idea of donating the property was brought to him by the church treasurer, Pat Thomas.

"The idea of a small community of tiny homes got the ball rolling," Hayden said.

See HOPE, A5

## HOPE

From Page A1

"We were going to lease them the property, but the conference recommended donating it if we really believe in them and what they were are doing."

It took about a year to go from the idea to a vote by the congregation, which overwhelmingly approved the move to donate the property. The final details of the donation and contingencies are being worked out by the lawyers, and the final documents are slated to be signed before Feb. 1.

Forward Paths founder Denise Burry said housing has always been an issue for the young people they help.

"It's so hard to get into housing on your own and things have to change," Burry said. "They have to be given an opportunity to get their education and job skills."

Currently, the group rents two houses and five apartments to provide housing for the young adults it helps. So far Forward Paths has a \$150,000 community development grant for renovations of the houses, which have three bedrooms each, and are starting a fundraising campaign to build tiny houses on the site.

They are also seeking a location to open a thrift store in Eustis to help support their services.

Burry started Forward Paths six years ago in her home. She now has an office at Morrison United Methodist Church where the group also has a food pantry.

The group's vision statement lays out its goals: "Together we can create a path that leads to independence. Our vision is of a supportive community that aids these

youths in acquiring housing, transportation, job skills and other needed services that will direct them on a forward path to success."

If you would like to

donate, cash is always welcome, along with hygiene items and cleaning items.

For more information or to volunteer, go to [forwardpaths.org](http://forwardpaths.org).