

# The Eternal Rock Church

## History

A small church with large dreams – that’s one way to describe the Eternal Rock Church in Chester, South Carolina.

It was in 1976 when Bernard Morris, a barber by trade, received what he describes as a vision from God to bring God’s word to people. Through non-denominational services, Bible study, and prayer, Rev. Morris was compelled to show people that, no matter what their situation or station in life, they can achieve the glory that is God’s gift.

From that vision and with the help of his wife, Diane, and their family, he started holding Bible study and preaching out of his home. Yet, he could always see a proper church in his mind’s eye.

From those humble beginnings, the Morris family and those to whom they ministered worked to achieve their first big dream – a church building. In 1979, the congregation broke ground for the building at 2183 Dawson Road at the corner of York Road. Rev. Morris, his family, and members of the congregation worked on the building while worshipping out of a donated space. With many helping hands and funds raised through donations and tithing, the congregation was able to dedicate the building in 1983 free of debt.



As the Morris family became more and more involved with the church, Rev. Morris made the difficult decision to give up the job he loved. But there was a new dream -- to minister to church members not just from the pulpit but on a more intimate level. Rev. Morris said the church needed a space where a more interactive style of worship was possible. The church needed a fellowship hall.

“I don’t want to preach *at* people,” he explained. “I want to preach *to* them.”

Again the small congregation, which averages around 200 people, got to work putting another dream into action. They built a fellowship hall next to the sanctuary finishing that in 1985. The hall hosts welcome dinners, prayer meetings, Bible study, and other activities that bring members (and potential members) together in an informal atmosphere to share God’s word.

The church is located in a low income area, and Rev. Morris said many of his parishioners live in poverty. It is sometimes a challenge to get people to see beyond their circumstances to the prospects ahead. Rev. Morris said he sees a growing need to help young people focus on the good things, the potential, in their lives. He wants to help them see that they are loved and that they can rise above poor circumstances with hard work and perseverance.

A new dream has sprouted from this need, a dream to benefit people throughout the Chester community regardless of religious affiliation. The next dream the church is working toward is to build and establish a community center located on about two donated acres on the corner diagonally across from the church. The pastor sees the center as initially helping young people to deal with the challenges of poverty and joblessness. He foresees the center offering help with alternatives to violence, building self-esteem, parenting, job skills, and financial management. From there he foresees afterschool programs and programs for older citizens.

It may be a big dream, but Rev. Morris knows it will be another that will come to fruition.

### **Leadership**

Bernard Morris, pastor

### **Contact Information**

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# The North Chester Community Center Project

## **Purpose**

The community center will address the needs of a community at the poverty level. Serving people of all faiths and backgrounds, the center will establish programs that provide alternatives to violence, build self esteem, fight teenage pregnancy, teach proper parenting strategies, offer approaches to financial stability, and provide opportunities to build job skills.

## **Community Characteristics**

Chester County is located in the northern, central part of South Carolina. It includes the City of Chester (the county seat) and the towns of Fort Lawn, Great Falls, Lowrys, and Richburg. The economy is based on industry and agriculture.

There is a growing concern that the needs of a significant young population in the county are not being met. It is with an eye to the county's demographics that the leadership of Eternal Rock Church feels compelled to establish a Community Center.

## ***Population***

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the county had a total estimated population in 2013 of 32,578. Of this, about 30 percent was younger than 18 and 32.4 percent 24 or younger. This was divided about equally (16 percent each) for males and females younger than 24.

The county has about 12,472 households. There are 6,332 children younger than 18 living with a parent or parents; 1,448 living with other relatives; and 143 living with nonrelatives. This means about 5 percent of children younger than 18 in the country are in households without a parent.

In the county, 12.6 percent of total households are single-parent with children younger than 18; 10 percent are women head of households. This means one in 10 households is a female, single-parent with children 18 or younger.

## ***Education***

A significant number of the population has not achieved a high school diploma or equivalent. Almost a quarter of the male population has not achieved this and about 21 percent of women. Of these, 3.3 percent of men are 18 to 24 and 2.6 of women are 18 to 24.

The latest public high school dropout rate for the Chester School District reported by the State of South Carolina Education Department for the 2011-12 school year is 3.5 per cent. (It is important to note that the high school population is small and as little as five individuals can significantly change the rate.)

## ***Income***

An estimated 20 percent of people in Chester are living below the poverty level. About 7.6 percent of men in the county have an income below the poverty level and 12.3 percent of women do. It is important to note that, of these individuals, 79 percent of the men and almost 82 percent of the women have a high school education or less.

## **Need Statement**

In Chester County, there are many young people who are growing up without a traditional family structure, below the poverty level, and with minimal education. More and more these young people are turning to destructive behavior which is sometimes criminal or violent. There is a growing gang problem.

To combat this tendency, Eternal Rock wants to establish the Community Center to provide a more constructive outlet. The Community Center would provide a safe, accepting environment for young people to learn and develop positive life skills.

## **Phase I - Construction**

The first phase of the project is to construct a building for the center. About two acres of land at the corner of York Road and Dawson Drive (J.A. Cochran Bypass), diagonally across from Eternal Rock Church, was donated to the church for the project.

A 96,000 square foot building is proposed. The estimated cost for construction is about \$125,000.



About two donated acres at the corner of York Road and Dawson Drive (J.A. Cochran Bypass) is the proposed site for the Community Center