

MONDAY

MAY 9, 2005

50 CENTS

140TH YEAR No. 170

The Virginian-Pilot



Mostly sunny today.
High near 70. D6

SERVING HAMPTON ROADS AND NORTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

"God wants to touch those women. They're forgotten." DORIS DUNEKACK, JOY MINISTRIES



JASON M. HIRSCHFELD

Asia Parker, 6, of Virginia Beach, and her mother, Dondra Parker, attended the Joy Ministries' Mother's Day program Sunday.

Event honors local mothers with meal, song and praise

BY NICOLE MORGAN
THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

NORFOLK — Dondra Parker is a single mother whose children say she goes without basic necessities to give them what they need — and want.

Her 11-year-old son, Carlos Parker, said, "She'll buy us clothes, but she won't buy herself clothes."

When asked how that made him feel, Carlos said, "Not good. She needs to do stuff for her, too."

Parker, of Virginia Beach, works as a customer relations representative and is busy raising two children, Carlos and his sister, Asia Parker, 6. She finally decided to do a little something for herself Sunday and attended a Mother's Day program at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott.

The event, sponsored by the Virginia Beach-based Joy Ministries, drew about 1,500 people, according to organizers.

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Event: Mothers gather to celebrate their day

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It was geared toward widows, single mothers and wives whose military husbands are deployed.

"God wants to touch those women. They're forgotten," said Doris Duneckack, an office manager at Joy Ministries.

This year was the organization's fifth annual Mother's Day program. The Rev. Danette Crawford, founder of Joy Ministries, is a single mother. Many women have called the organization crying, saying they didn't want to be alone on Mother's Day, Duneckack said.

So Joy Ministries' staff circulated fliers in neighborhoods throughout Hampton Roads, gassed up eight 48-passenger buses to pick up moms who said they couldn't drive to the program, and welcomed hundreds of other moms who did drive.

There were drums, keyboards and singers. And moms dressed in their Sunday best sat down to a three-course meal by candlelight.

Norfolk Vice Mayor Daun S. Hester spoke to the moms and, quoting Bible scripture, said that the road might get rough, but always walk by faith, not by sight. She quoted the book of Proverbs, calling women priceless. And, Hester said, mothers are often models of physical, spiritual, mental and moral strength.

But she charged them to take a break from nurturing children, husbands and anyone else who needs help. "Take care of yourselves," she said. "You owe it to yourselves and your families."

Parker, 40, said she's trying to take care of herself, too. But, at times it gets dif-



JASON M. HIRSCHFELD PHOTOS

Linda Morris, a singer from Rock Church in Virginia Beach, performs Sunday for attendees of the Joy Ministries' fifth annual Mother's Day program at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott. The event was geared toward widows, single mothers and wives whose husbands are deployed.

ficult. She's had to make big decisions on her own, especially when it came to helping her son to improve his focus in school.

She did it. Carlos is on the honor roll now, she said. But doing it solo wasn't easy.

"You need God, I'll tell you that."

She said she gets lonely. She still hopes to get married to a "faithful, Christian man." She said she's had relationships, but they didn't work.

When times get rough, Parker said, she just thinks of her favorite song, "The Battle is The Lord's," by gospel singer Yolanda Adams.

After that, she doesn't feel like she's by herself. "When you think about it," she said, "you have God."

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Doris Duneckack, left, of Joy Ministries, helps Tawanda Parker, center, and Tashawna, 10, look for their registration packet to attend the Mother's Day event Sunday.