

# Wider Net Celebrates 15 Years

On June 10, 2001, Northminster voted to embrace “A Wider Net.”

## Wider Net Marks Fifteen Years

By Kelley Williams, Jr.

This June marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “A Wider Net” at Northminster. To celebrate the occasion, we will be including a series of inserts in the church newsletter reviewing the history and some of the accomplishments of “A Wider Net” over the past fifteen years. This insert is the first.

When most Northminster members hear the term “Wider Net” they think of the church’s many activities and partnerships in the Georgetown/Mid-City neighborhoods. What our newer members, those who have joined Northminster in the last 5-10 years, may not realize is that this is only half of “A Wider Net.” The other half took place – and takes place – right here on Ridge-wood Road.



In 1998 the Long Range Planning Committee chaired by Mary Foose recognized the constraints of Northminster’s physical facilities, which at the time consisted of the original sanctuary, the Great Hall and children's area, the youth house, and the church office. There was no balcony nor adult education building. To support the church’s continued growth, the LRPC recommended completion of the balcony (which was in the original architectural plans for the sanctuary) and addition of new educational space.

These constraints grew more acute over the ensuing years, and it was not uncommon for worshipers to sit in folding chairs in the narthex on Sunday mornings.

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There was also discussion of borrowing space from Casey School for Sunday School classes, and members were even asked if they'd be willing to plant a new church elsewhere. (There were few, if any, takers.)

(There were few, if any, takers.) By 2001, on the heels of two more ad hoc committees (the wheels of congregational polity grind slowly at Northminster), the church was finally ready to act. Thus, when the congregation voted to adopt "A Wider Net" on June 10, 2001, the "visible but forgotten half" was the construction of the balcony and education building and a reconfiguration of our parking lot to accommodate more vehicles.

Concurrent with the church's study of its physical needs at Ridgewood Road had been the growing sense that a significant investment onsite should be accompanied by significant investment offsite. This thought, first voiced by Pastor Chuck Poole, led to the formation of the Ad-Hoc Special Missions Project Committee in 1999, which conducted their work in parallel with the Building Committee. The SMPC, chaired by Cheryl Allen, spent a great deal of time talking to other nonprofits in the city, including churches, hoping to learn from their experiences.

While the SMPC solicited lots of input, the committee leaned heavily on the experiences of Christ United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church of Jackson, both of which had launched significant missions and ministries in inner city Jackson (Midtown and West Park, respectively). The committee took to heart a few lessons that have guided A Wider Net since. One was to keep a narrow geographic focus. Selecting one neighborhood or even one street was preferable to spreading resources over too wide an area. Another was the importance of having a local presence, someone on the ground to serve as the eyes and ears of both church and community. A third was the importance of listening to the community, of not offering programs and services that might seem valuable from our vantage point but that might be lower on community residents' priority list.

Thus, the original document titled "A Wider Net" that was distributed to the church in June of 2001 was the synthesis of two reports, one from the Building Committee and one from the Special Missions Project Committee. Subsequent newsletter inserts will review the original missions recommendations from Wider Net – A Person, A Place, and an Initial Act of Ministry – and how the more recognizable piece of Wider Net has played out over the years.

