

Wider Net

Celebrates 15 Years

To mark the 15th anniversary of "A Wider Net, we continue our series about how "A Wider Net" was birthed and how it has evolved over its history. In this insert, Northminster member Cindy Griffin recounts for us our "initial act of ministry": our partnership with Habitat for Humanity Metro Capital Area.

In June 2001, Northminster voted to embark on an effort to expand the physical space "within our walls" and to reach out in friendship to a neighborhood in need of help and hope "beyond our walls." The intent was (and still is today) to develop ministry programs in response to conversations with neighborhood residents that would touch their lives spiritually, physically and socially, and empower them in the name of Christ.

Our initial act of Wider Net ministry was to partner with Habitat for Humanity Mississippi Capital Area (then known as Habitat for Humanity Metro Jackson) to establish an aggressive homebuilding effort in the MidCity/Georgetown neighborhood, what we now call our Wider Net area. As a proven and respected



partner, Habitat provided a legitimate purpose with which to introduce ourselves to the neighborhood and build trust with the residents.

The Habitat and Northminster partnership required a leap of faith for both entities. Until this time, Habitat had focused its building efforts on revitalizing the Midtown neighborhood (just west of Millsaps College and Baptist Health Systems and across the railroad tracks from MidCity), building more than 125 Habitat homes in this extremely blighted and crime-ridden inner city area. Because the Habitat model is a long-term partnership with the homeowner families, the decision to commit to an additional neighborhood was a big step and commitment for Habitat and one that was not taken lightly.

The "MidCity Campaign," as it was initially called by Habitat, proposed to take the Midtown model to the MidCity/Georgetown neighborhood with a commitment to build 20 homes in three years there. Northminster's commitment secured funding for the

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20 lots, the cost of an additional construction supervisor position, and sponsorships for six homes. Northminster also volunteered aid in the important task of finding qualified families willing to make MidCity/Georgetown their home.

The six homes to which Northminster initially committed were completed by 2004, but Northminster continued to partner with Habitat in MidCity/Georgetown. Along with multiple interfaith partners, Northminster helped to build another home in MidCity and to landscape 20 Habitat homes on Wood Street and Erie Court through the interfaith Planting Peace project. Northminster and Habitat also partnered together to accomplish 10 critical home repairs through Habitat's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative. Most recently, Northminster helped to rehab six Habitat homes in MidCity/Georgetown for new homeowners. Northminster and Habitat continue to find fruitful ways to partner in helping MidCity/Georgetown be a good place to grow up and to grow old.

What impact has this partnership forged? In 2008 and again in 2014, Habitat conducted two resident satisfaction surveys to measure the impacts of this work on neighborhood revitalization over time. The most notable and significant improvements were:

- Reduction of blighted properties;
- Increased neighborhood safety through reduced crime;
- Increased awareness and participation in the neighborhood associations;
- Increased positive police presence and swifter responses to MidCity;
- Increased resident pride and higher neighborhood satisfaction among residents;
- Increased home values;
- Residents sense of community and cohesion. Residents look out for each other.

Habitat is still committed to the MidCity/Georgetown neighborhood and relies on the committed presence of Northminster as a stabilizing and empowering force in this neighborhood. To date, 92 Habitat homes have been built in MidCity/Georgetown. Habitat's initial \$1.2 million campaign to expand into MidCity/Georgetown, of which Northminster was an integral part, has grown to an estimated \$10,000,000 investment in the MidCity/Georgetown neighborhood.

