

Ways to Connect with Developing Great Neighborhoods

“Community work gives us a sense of building something that we are all collectively a part of—something that can give us pride in working together to achieve.”

~ Alonzo Rodgers, Mount Moriah Church

Make a Difference Through Prayer

- Praise God for the rich tapestry of Knoxville's many neighborhoods, and most importantly for the people who live in them.
- Praise God for the many community servants throughout the city working tirelessly to make life better for their neighbors.
- Pray for Christians to be good neighbors, and to offer a living witness to God's love and character.
- Pray that every neighborhood in Knoxville might have the building blocks of a healthy community: caring churches, strong families, sufficient jobs, access to healthcare, affordable housing, sound public infrastructure, and safety.
- Pray for people living in neighborhoods where their surroundings fill them with fear, shame and despair. May the church be a catalyst for the restoration of security, self-respect and hope.
- Pray for people living in neighborhoods where people are isolated from one another. May the church be a catalyst for building meaningful relationships that fill lives with joy and purpose.
- Pray that God would break down the walls of prejudice and ignorance that divide people within and among neighborhoods, replacing them with an appreciation for God's gifts of reconciliation and diversity.
- Pray that youth throughout Knoxville be may empowered with a sense of responsibility and pride in their community, so that they grow up dedicated to making a difference where they live—rather than desiring only to escape.
- Pray that Knoxville churches would be increasingly drawn to active, servant-minded involvement with the community in which God has planted them.

Make a Difference Through Your Life

Be a great neighbor:

- Meditate on Jesus' Great Commandment to love God and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). Consider how this applies to loving your *literal* neighbor.
- If you don't know your neighbors well, start by saying hello. Bring over cookies or invite their children to play with yours. Find out if you have shared interests. Take time to ask your neighbors meaningful questions, and to share about your life in return. Offer to help out when you become aware of a need, or simply to listen. Pace your life to be more available to those who live around you.
- One way to get to know your neighbors is by organizing a canned food drive for a local food pantry. After distributing flyers letting people know about the drive, find a

partner to go with you door to door to collect the food. Don't be in a rush if people want to stop and talk.

- Make it a family habit to go on prayer walks through your neighborhood, praying silently for each home and asking God to open doors of opportunity for you to share the love of Christ in word and deed with your neighbors.
- Practice mutual aid. If you want to help your neighbors, be willing to accept help in return.
- Learn about the history, special attributes and attractions of your neighborhood to enrich your perspective on the uniqueness of your community and to be able to share that with others.
- Show up at meetings where neighborhood concerns are being discussed. See the weekly "Neighborhood Advisory" newsletter from the city's Office of Neighborhoods for a listing of events of interest (sign up by contacting 215-3456 or neighborhoods@cityofknoxville.org).
- Apply to join the Neighborhood Advisory Council, which gives advice and feedback to the city administration on neighborhood concerns. To volunteer to serve on the Council, or to nominate someone else, call 215-3232 (<http://www.cityofknoxville.org/development/neighborhoods/advisory.asp>).

Build neighborhood connections:

- Help your neighbors get to know one another. Plan events like a block BBQ or progressive supper, or invite neighbors to join you in a walking group.
- Start a neighborhood Bible study. Host it in your home, or combine it with a meal and rotate from house to house. Make it a family-friendly affair by inviting another neighbor to lead activities for the children during the study.
- Open your home to neighborhood-based youth ministry: a homework club, a backyard Vacation Bible School, a flag football tournament, a teen movie and game night. Invite other neighbors to help you run it.
- Start a club or support group that brings people in your community together around a shared interest (e.g., a book club, a support group for families with a disability, or a group to promote local energy conservation and recycling).
- Where are the "third places" in your community—the gathering places where people go to relax and meet together? Consider maintaining a Christian presence at the most popular "hang out" spots, as a way of getting to know and being available to people in your community you might not otherwise meet.
- Reflect on the question, "What would make the place where I live a great neighborhood for everyone? What would it take for every resident to be able to say, 'I love living here'?" Then ask other neighbors this question. Begin dreaming and working together.

Make a Difference Through Your Church

Make prayer the cornerstone of a great community:

- Lead a team in regular times of prayer-walking through your neighborhood, asking God's blessing on each residence, business and organization (see the prayer-walking guide on the Compassion Coalition website, or order a community prayer guide at www.waymakers.org).
- Start a community prayer team. Make it known in the neighborhood that your church welcomes prayer requests from people even if they don't attend your church. Sponsor a "prayer station" at community events.
- At times of neighborhood crisis—such as a school shooting, an apartment fire, or a natural disaster—be ready to respond with a healing, helping, prayerful presence.
- Invite local churches to come together for a special day of prayer for the neighborhood.

Help build meaningful connections in the community:

- Plan special events that bring neighbors together, or make the church available to host events sponsored by other community groups. Examples include a block party, potluck meal, holiday celebration, children's carnival, outdoor concert, health fair, sports tournament, neighborhood bazaar or garage sale, parade, or cultural festival.
- Are there groups of people in your neighborhood who need a safe, accessible, wholesome gathering place? Consider developing a coffee house for young adults, a drop-in center for seniors, a skate park for teenagers, or a toddler playground for parents with young children.
- Create opportunities for intergenerational interactions. For example, start a "grandparents' club" to pair lonely seniors with children with lots of love to share. Organize an apprenticeship program to match youth with an older adult who can teach a skill they want to learn, e.g., carpentry, auto or bike repair, chess, cooking, knitting or other crafts.
- Sponsor a "listening project" to build connections with members of the community who are often less visible, or less valued. Train youth or young adults to collect life stories from people such as nursing home residents, people who are homebound by a disability, recent immigrants or refugees, or people who work the night shift. Paying attention to their stories is a way of affirming that they belong and matter to the community. Explore ways to follow up by engaging the gifts and dreams of these "hidden" people in community service. See Susan Rans, *Hidden Treasures* (Asset Based Community Development Institute, 2005), www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/hiddentreasures.

Use the resources of your church as a blessing to your community:

- Make arrangements to offer space at low or no cost to local nonprofits or groups, such as a daycare, neighborhood association or recovery support group.
- Develop a mutual aid program to match community needs with community resources. One example is Word of Life's Helping Hands Ministry which enables people to share clothing and household items with one another, recognizing that "Everyone is blessed to be a blessing in the process of giving" (<http://wordoflifeknoxville.com>).
- Open the church's recreational facilities (e.g., playground, gym, basketball court) for public use, with appropriate supervision and insurance coverage as necessary.

- Start a community garden on church property. Contact Knox County Community Action Committee (546-3500) to learn about community gardening. Visit the Compassion Coalition website for a list of community gardens around the city.
- Support a local neighborhood association, community organizing group or community development initiative. Offer meeting space, and invite church members to pray for and participate in the group's activities.
- Provide a list of locally-owned stores and restaurants to church members who want to support neighborhood businesses.
- Show support for the community by holding church meetings out in the neighborhood—e.g. at a coffee shop, community center, or park.
- Offer space and resources in your church to local artists in exchange for creating public works of art that enhance the beauty and uniqueness of your neighborhood.

Help discover, develop and connect community assets:

- Engage in a community study to learn about the unique history and demographics of your neighborhood, and to assess its strengths and needs. The study process can involve church members working alongside other community residents. A community study guide is available on the Compassion Coalition website.
- Facilitate a community roundtable with representatives from all the groups with a stake in the well-being of the community: churches, nonprofits, neighborhood associations, local businesses, schools, civic leaders and diverse residents. Facilitate a conversation about the strengths, needs, and dreams of the community, and encourage participants to imagine possibilities for creative connections between groups to bring about a desired change.
- Develop an inventory of neighborhood assets, such as nonprofits, local activities for children and families, parks and other public spaces, and sites of cultural or historical significance. Share this directory of resources with residents and community groups.
- Host a community fair as a way of introducing residents to all the cultural and civic groups, recreational activities, social service resources and volunteer opportunities available in their area. The fair can also showcase local artistic talent and homemade crafts.
- Help organize a neighborhood newsletter or website to keep people informed of local events and resources.
- Identify neighborhood residents who have the gift of knowing everything that is going on, and ask them to keep the church informed of opportunities to bless the community through prayer and service.

Encourage a sense of ownership and pride in the community:

- Clean up and "green up"! In partnership with other neighborhood groups, organize a day to improve public spaces and beautify the neighborhood: pick up litter, paint a mural, cover graffiti, plant flowers, repair or replace playground equipment, clean and landscape abandoned lots. Encourage families in the congregation and in the neighborhood to serve together.
- Develop a neighborhood maintenance and service network that coordinates volunteers from various churches and community groups. Mow lawns, paint, and

perform minor home repairs for residents who have difficulty maintaining their property due to age or disability.

- Connect with a school or after-school program in your neighborhood to sponsor a children's art, photography or essay contest, on the theme of "What I love about my community." Display their works in church.
- Hold an annual award ceremony to recognize individuals and groups who have worked to improve the well-being of the community.

Start or join initiatives to enhance the quality of life in the community:

- Form a community patrol that trains and deploys teams of volunteers to be visible in the neighborhood at critical locations and times (such as routes children walk to and from school, Friday and Saturday evenings, or special community events) to deter crime and vandalism, provide first aid, and serve as a liaison with police. One way to do this is through the Volunteer Courtesy Officers program (215-8620, <http://www.ci.knoxville.tn.us/kpd/vco.asp>).
- Start or join a Neighborhood Watch, which organizes members of a community to look out for one another and to contact the police about potential threats to public safety (<http://www.cityofknoxville.org/kpd/neighborhood.asp>).
- Sponsor an open forum or town meeting on a specific local concern, such as affordable housing, abandoned cars, or the desire for a bike path, and work together with others in the community to follow up with a plan of action.
- Explore ways to make the neighborhood more pedestrian-friendly, such as new sidewalks, slower speed limits, greenways (undeveloped corridors with walking/biking paths), and pedestrian-only shopping districts or "village squares."
- Consider launching a community development corporation that can apply for public and private grants and manage community development projects. This is a significant commitment that needs to be carefully and prayerfully weighed.
- See the chapter on embracing low-income communities for suggestions relating more specifically to ministering in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Resources for developing great neighborhoods in the Knoxville area:

The following organizations offer resources to individuals, community groups and churches working to improve their neighborhood. For organizations that use volunteers to provide community services, see the Ways to Connect section of other chapters.

City of Knoxville Office of Neighborhoods: 215-3232,

neighborhoods@cityofknoxville.org,

<http://www.cityofknoxville.org/development/neighborhoods/default.asp>

Strengthens relationships between city departments and neighborhood groups, and collaborates with neighborhoods to address issues of shared concern. Helps build the capacity of citizen-led groups through leadership training and other organizing tools.

Offers an interactive neighborhood mapping feature, an online list of neighborhood associations where registered organizations can post information about their group, and a weekly "Neighborhood Advisory" newsletter on issues and events of interest to local communities.

City of Knoxville Community Development Department: 215-2120,

<http://www.cityofknoxville.org/development/default.asp>

Supports efforts to revitalize low- and moderate-income communities by promoting sustainable growth and development initiatives. Includes programs to promote affordable housing and home repairs; façade improvement and other neighborhood improvement projects; empowerment zone initiatives; and redevelopment of specific disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods Small Grants Program (East Tennessee Foundation): 524-1223,

<http://www.easttennesseefoundation.org>

In partnership with the City of Knoxville Office of Neighborhoods, awards small grants to local community-based groups led by residents who develop and execute their own solutions to neighborhood issues and problems.

Fountain City Connections: 281-9165, www.fountaincityconnections.org

Organizes citizens for the purpose of making Knoxville more pedestrian-friendly. Promotes the development of sidewalks, pathways and greenways to connect all parts of our city, as well as programs to educate pedestrians and drivers about safe practices. Offers resources to help neighborhood groups document repair and development needs relating to sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic lights and greenways.

Knox County Office of Neighborhoods and Codes Enforcement: 215-HELP,

neighborhoods@knoxcounty.org, <http://www.knoxcounty.org/oon/index.php>

Serves as a resource for information, problem-solving and technical assistance for residents and neighborhood groups, with the goal of empowering citizens and helping to promote active neighborhood involvement. Hosts a "Neighborhood Night" in a different community each month to give citizens the opportunity to interact with public officials.

Knoxville Leadership Foundation Center for Communities: 524-2774,

http://www.klf.org/index.php/programs/center_for_communities

Strengthens the capacity of non-profits to serve their community by providing training in

areas such as fundraising, program evaluation, marketing, strategic planning, and partnership development.

Metropolitan Planning Commission: 215-2500, contact@knoxmpc.org,

<http://www.knoxmpc.org>

Provides information on the website relevant to community development, including a directory of neighborhood associations; a Neighborhood Organization Handbook; and data and reports on neighborhood planning and development.

How to Learn More

- The City of Knoxville's Office of Neighborhoods (215-3232, www.cityofknoxville.org/neighborhoods) provides training and consultation for neighborhood groups on topics including how to start a neighborhood group, leadership development, membership recruitment, and land use and zoning issues.
- Download the *Neighborhood Organization Handbook* from the Metropolitan Planning Commission, which offers practical guidance on starting a neighborhood organization, and a list of ideas for community improvements.
- For a list of neighborhood associations in Knox County, see the links provided by the City of Knoxville's Office on Neighborhoods (<http://www.ci.knoxville.tn.us/newcomers/neighborhood.asp>) or the Neighborhood Directory provided by the Metropolitan Planning Commission (<http://www.knoxmpc.org/director/orgs/ndhome.htm>).
- Form a study group to learn about Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and prayerfully consider this approach to helping neighborhoods strengthen themselves (see Being Church With the Community in Section III).
- Helpful resources for churches include the websites for the Communities First Association (www.communitiesfirstassociation.org); the Christian Community Development Association (www.ceda.org); and the Collaboration for Neighborhood Transformation (<http://www.healthwholeness.net>).