

— WALKING — TOGETHER

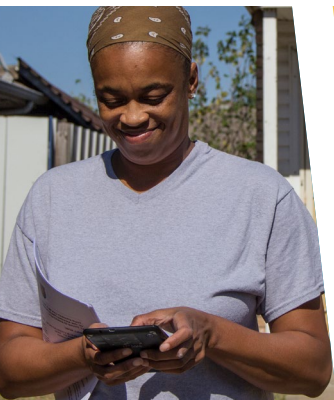


2017 LENTEN STUDY



ZIP CODE
CONNECTION

NTCWALKINGTOGETHER.ORG



Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

-ISAIAH 58.6-9AA

WALKING TOGETHER

The season of Lent is a journey in Christian discipleship. It marks the forty days leading up to Easter (not counting Sundays), and is symbolic of the forty days Jesus fasted in the desert before setting out on his own ministry journey. As such, a longstanding Christian tradition is fasting, or “giving something up” for Lent as we prepare our own hearts and lives for the journey to the Cross, and ultimately, to the promise of the Resurrection.



BY GIVING UP JUST
ONE HOUR'S WAGE
EACH WEEK, YOU
CAN TRULY MAKE
A DIFFERENCE IN
THE LIVES OF THE
NEIGHBORS YOU'LL
MEET THROUGHOUT
THIS STUDY.

This year, the North Texas Conference Zip Code Connection invites you to experience Lent in a new way. We invite United Methodists across North Texas to walk the journey toward Holy Week and Easter in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in South Dallas/Fair Park and Clarksville/Red River County. We invite you to hear their stories and to see them – perhaps for the first time – as fellow travelers on the journey toward deeper discipleship with Christ and deeper relationship with you, their neighbors. In this study, you'll meet a new neighbor each day who will share his or her personal story, prayer, and scripture as a daily devotional guide. Each Sunday, you'll have the opportunity to discuss the readings with guided questions for groups, or use them for personal reflection.

Finally, we invite you to “give up poverty” for Lent. By this we mean setting aside an hour's wage each week during these forty days to support two innovative ministries that enable neighborhoods to lift themselves out of poverty:

- Economic development efforts in Clarksville/Red River County that will provide small business training and access to capital
- The launching of the Fair Park District Entrepreneur Center (“The District”) in South Dallas/Fair Park

By giving up just one hour's wage each week by visiting walkingtogetherntc.org, you can truly make a difference in the lives of the neighbors you'll meet throughout the study, and together, we will walk the journey toward giving up poverty for good in North Texas.

Let the journey begin...



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THURSDAY, MARCH 2

I Grew Up Here

I graduated from Lincoln. I lived my childhood in South Dallas and compared to a lot of stories from my neighborhood, I had a good childhood.

My mom was a sophomore in high school when I was born. We lived with our grandparents, which is not uncommon here, and my grandmother kept me from too much trouble. What you have to understand is the role models I had were drug dealers and heads of gangs. They flashed the money and the cars but never told you how many years in jail they spent before they came back. I joined a gang when I was 10. It was our hope of a better life.

I joined a gang but my grandmother had me in piano so I'm not sure that I fit the picture of your typical

gang stereotype. I got accepted to Townview to play piano and was bussed to the school outside of my neighborhood. One day my gang came to get me from Townview. I was on the bus as they surrounded it and began to cause it to rock. They demanded that I be let off. The principal came out and got rid of them. When she took me off the bus I didn't know what to expect. This is just the way it is. She took me into her office and said, "I can kick you out of school today or I can pray for you." It was then that she began to pray over me and I decided that day that I was going to be better than my situation. There was hope...



I am Brandon. Pray with me today: May I approach each family in South Dallas that I see today with a deep sense of grace. May God give me the strength to be their hope.

When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run,
you will not stumble. PROVERBS 4: 12



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FRIDAY, MARCH 3

Feeling Safe

Clarksville is home. I grew up here. My parents were raised here. My husband was raised here. We're just native, it's where we've always been. I left for a short time to go to the University of North Texas but came right back here to teach. It is my calling.

I grew up during a time of segregation in Clarksville. There was a white school and a black school. To this day, I don't remember much about what the African-American school looked like nor do I know how their school was different than mine. The town was pretty segregated as well as to who lived where. We integrated our school during my freshman year in 1969 in the midst of the Vietnam war. It was an interesting raising.

Growing up here was idyllic. I started riding my bike around the town at 6. It was safe and we weren't ever fearful of being away from our family. I remember going to the dime store for candy and down the street to see friends. I remember walking

the town on a summer day and waving to neighbors in their yards. Everybody knew who you were and there was great comfort in that.

Today, Clarksville still feels safe. My little neighbor, a boy of about 7, is out on his bike from morning until sundown some days. Everyone knows everybody. The kids at school love to go downtown to the bank. Jim Clark has a bowl of candy waiting on his desk for the kids to come in and take. His assistant knows the kids and about their lives and it's not the only business in town that goes the extra little step to make this a good place.

With Zip Code Connection creating The Hub we have seen children really get an opportunity to gather in that central place outside of school. You can drive by and see their bikes parked outside or the Boys and Girls Club having some sort of adventure on any given day.



I am Marianne. Pray with me today: Lord, keep our town safe. Hold the hands of our children as they explore your world with wide-eyed wonder and open hearts.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. PSALM 62:8



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SATURDAY, MARCH 4

No Sections in Heaven

There is some perception that outsiders aren't welcome here. I have had many of my own friends ask me if I'm scared to walk around and just talk to folks. Here is my response, "I've never seen a preacher jumped for saying hello and telling someone that Jesus loves them, not here." Once people know you don't want their money, they'll give you five minutes. I won't allow the past or the enemy to tell me that I can't reach out to my brothers and sisters. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and friends, it's about Christ. If we can stop getting distracted by all of the other voices, "They might not like me" or "I might not be able to relate" then we can really connect.

I went to college at Liberty. It was a predominantly white, conservative school and my roommate fit right in. One day he said, "Mark, I want to ask you some questions, some questions about black people." Now, I could have gotten angry, defensive and even walked away but I opened the door to talk. We talked about watermelon, fried chicken and all sorts of other

things. We talked for 2 to 3 hours. We discovered we both loved Kentucky Fried Chicken. KFC is a southern thing; we are both southerners. I say this because we all need to know that we can connect with those who might seem to be the least likely of friends. Later in our time together, we traveled to Washington. D.C. He was afraid he might get jumped. I laughed and said well I've got you if you do. We'll just tell them about Jesus and hope they back up. It's the intimate one on one connections that allow us to break down the walls and get to know each other.

Only been to South Dallas to go to the State Fair? Try coming to eat at Henderson's chicken or come down for church and worship together. We serve the same God; we serve the same Jesus. God's not going to have a black section of heaven or a white section and what if there was? Then there would be a poor black section, a poor white section, the rich black section...come on now. It's not going to be like that. It's going to be one heaven. So why don't we act like that now, here.



I am Mark. Pray with me today: Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are one in Christ Jesus. GALATIANS 3:27-28

SUNDAY, MARCH 5

Reflection/Questions

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. – MARK 1.12-13

When we remain in a state of separation from our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ, it is as if we are wandering in the wilderness. We were created for relationship – with God, and with one another. But we are often tempted to retreat into our own circles of comfort, where it is easy to build walls of perception to “protect” us from others. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness resisting the temptation to be something other than who was created to be. Let the following questions guide you in reflecting on this week’s stories and the ways our perceptions tempt us to build communities of division, and how overcoming our perceptions can lead us to creating communities of shalom.

1. Mark says of his community, “There’s a perception that outsiders aren’t welcome here.” When have you been tempted to allow perceptions of others to prevent you from getting to know them?

2. What would others say about their acceptance in the places where you live? Work? Worship?


3. Brandon found hope when a caring individual chose to pray for him, rather than punish him. How might you be a source of hope to someone in need of a caring individual to see her dignity and worth as a child of God?

PRAYER

God of all creation, you call us to be in community with one another. Even more, you call us your children. Help us to live as one family, breaking down divisions and barriers within our own hearts and lives that prevent us from knowing the full joy of your kin-dom. Help us to walk in solidarity with our siblings – your children – this day, and every day, as we seek to create communities of shalom.

AMEN



 As we continue to learn the stories of more of our neighbors in South Dallas/ Fair Park and Clarksville/Red River County, let us continue to set aside one hour’s wages each week, so that they too might know the full joy of God’s kin-dom.

Visit walkingtogetherntc.org to contribute.

(Kin-dom refers to the kinship God calls us to have with all of humanity.)

MONDAY, MARCH 6

Week Two

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

– LUKE 4.16-20

In the gospel of Luke, after Jesus returns home from his forty days of fasting in the wilderness, he begins his public ministry, teaching in the synagogues. When he came to Nazareth, his home town, these were the words he preached. This week, you'll read stories of people talking about their home towns. Glenda reminisces about her daddy taking her and her siblings to the park or out to eat in the community of South Dallas. Tammy shares what a tight knit family the people of Clarksville are. Each of the neighbors you'll meet this week are proud of their communities, and want to see them flourish for generations to come. As you learn their stories, consider how these words Jesus spoke to his own community of faith challenge us to join him in his ministry to bring good news to all communities – regardless of which community we call home.

PRAYER

Lord, open our eyes and our hearts to see all communities as home to you.

AMEN





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TUESDAY, MARCH 7

More Than a "Nobody" Town

We need a place and a reason to come together. Clarksville needs something, I don't know what that is, but we need something to bring affluent, poor, white, black...different...we need something to bring this community together.

We say that the Boys and Girls Club is only open until 5, but I often find myself here well after that. Children need to feel safe and we can provide that. They come to be cool on a hot summer's day. They come to know that someone is here to listen. They come for a place that no matter what has happened at home, drugs or anger, they have a door to walk through.

I remember being home on some holiday one year. The center was closed and it wasn't long before I received a phone call. One of the young boys that came regularly had gone to his neighbor's house to call me. He wanted to know

why the center wasn't open. I explained that it was a holiday but he was so sad. He didn't have anywhere to go without the center to celebrate. The next day, even though it was still a holiday, I arrived to open the center and the children came. When the town has very little to offer young children and young families, I am here to provide family and community for them.

There are good people here. Our community is older, but the people want to help one another and want to be part of each other's lives. But I think people think that we're just a small little town that doesn't care. We are just a nobody town. In a way, that is almost true. But we have something, we have each other. There are not many jobs, there is not a lot of money but if people come, we can grow. We can bring one another up. It's a good little community, we have our issues, but nothing we can't overcome.



I am Mina. Pray with me today: Lord, let there be peace in Clarksville. May we see our neighbors as you. May we worship, pray, laugh and dream as one. May we find jobs. May we be your people.

Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

-ROMANS 14:19



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

Donuts and Memories

I've been living in this part of South Dallas, where I stay now, for 16 years, but I lived across on the other side of the neighborhood for a lot of my childhood.

Being raised here, when I was, could be considered tough. There were not community centers to go spend the day at. We didn't have people offering Thanksgiving meals for those who couldn't afford it and didn't have a lot of things to do either. There weren't several parks. For the most part, the park was your backyard.

But it wasn't all tough. Children still played in the street when I was growing up. You'd leave the house at sun up to go find your friends and in the afternoon you would hear mamas standing on their front porches yelling, "Hey, y'all come on back in" and everyone would run home to wash up for dinner. My daddy worked for the Lonestar Donut Company so I had lots of friends.

We always had goodies like donuts or jellyrolls to share and everyone was free to get together whenever we liked.

Some my favorite memories were with my daddy. Since he worked for the donut factory he was able to stay home with us kids during the day. He didn't want us to be stuck at home all the time so he would make sure that we could go out and enjoy the community. We could go a little further to the park or to eat.

Before it was built, we used to go to the site where the Dallas Police Department is. They would have lumber, scraps and concrete that they were using to build various items and we would take the leftovers back to the projects to build. We just knew that we could do anything they could. We built forts and other structures that we would tell anyone was just as good as the City of Dallas.



I am Glenda. Pray with me today: I love looking back on the memories that I have in this community. Please help those who live here now to create great memories to come back to someday!

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children. DEUTERONOMY 4:9



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THURSDAY, MARCH 9

Forty-Four Years Here

I was born and raised in Clarksville. I've been here all of my life...44 years. My wife Jackie and I have been married for 21 years and we raised our children here. I work out of Paris and my wife works here for a local insurance company.

Growing up here was fun! We were a 3A school. But there has been some decline over the years. We went from around 1000 students to about 450 students. I've seen the town at its biggest and at its smallest. But don't count us out, we are here and we are hoping for growth. I like it here. I like the small town life. You can go next door to ask a neighbor for a favor because you know them!

People have moved away. We have a real lack of job opportunities for people in Clarksville. I'm lucky to only have a short commute of 30 miles so that a job

is accessible to me. My father-in-law is the pastor of the Baptist church not too far away and we have lots of family here. But not everyone has been so lucky to find work and have had to move away to be able to provide for their families.

There are challenges to our community's growth. We lost industry and have a significant water shortage. It's difficult to even address the lack of water since most of our water meters are out of date and we can't get accurate data. We have a shortage of entertainment. Young families want to live close to a movie theater and dining. We just don't have many options here. We don't have a Walmart.

But there is a lot of hope here. With small steps we will address the issues and build up the community.



I am Robert. Pray with me today: Lord, help to strengthen this town that I love. May we find industry, water, and the things we need to continue to be a vibrant community among your children.

Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13



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FRIDAY, MARCH 10

My Name is on Your Name

Summertime was my favorite growing up. There were several recreation centers in South Dallas that offered free activities for children and we had so many great times doing art, music, playing volleyball or tether ball. Growing up in the 70s here felt safe. We walked everywhere, and walking in a community means you really get to know a community. It wasn't just a family raising their children, it was a community raising its young. That just doesn't exist anymore. I'm not sure it exists anywhere, but it doesn't exist in South Dallas.

Nowadays there is more poverty, more drugs and more alcohol. I know those things existed when I was a child but now they are far more visible. Stores have left this area, there is a huge lack of jobs and stuff just looks and is abandoned. But the media has it wrong. We aren't all negativity and violence.

When you come here you will find a lot of love and a lot of strength. I'm raising three kids here. I still

have aunts and family in the community so we're all doing this together. I like raising my children here. You don't forget your upbringing and I feel it is very important for them to know their roots. I tell them all the time, "Don't forget, my name is on your name." Meaning, when they are in this community, the way they act reflects on me. This is my home and they are expected to know right from wrong.

Around here, a lot of people have stayed because they have kept their homes for many, many years. We still own the house that I grew up in; my cousin lives there.

Be better than where you come from. I heard that a lot growing up and I tell my kids that often. Being better than where I came from means putting back in to the community that gave to me. It means my children respect the history of this community. It means that we have hope here.



I am Shawana. Pray with me today: Peace Lord, help your people find peace. I pray for the parents of the children in this community. May they teach their children about respect and instill good morals in them so that this community may find joy in peace.

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!

JOHN 16:33



SATURDAY, MARCH 11

Tight Knit

In third grade, my dad, who worked for the State of Texas, was told that his area in Paris was closing down and Red River County was one of the areas that he could move to. So we came here.

Growing up in Clarksville, everyone knew everyone. I had lots of friends and we were there to help each other. We were a tight knit community. If someone needed help, we knew it. And it wasn't something to judge, it meant that we could help them. I think that is the great thing about a small town. We are sometimes able to help people more. It's not just a person but a person who you've known for a long time, whose family lives down the street and who you really care about at the end of the day.

Relay for Life is a great example of how this community can come together. We may be

a small town and a community with limited resources, but we raised quite a bit of money for cancer research. We all know those who have passed from cancer in the town and it means something to come together to raise the funds. Everyone gathers to set up booths and create activities that promote community unity and raise funds. In one month we were able to raise around \$45,000. We may not always have much, but we give of what we have.

I have a friend whose son had cancer. In such a tight knit community everyone knew what was going on. There were numerous benefits that were put together just to pull the family through.

That is who Clarksville is.



I am Tammy. Pray with me today: May this town thrive so that its people, your children, may be blessed.

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him. -PSALM 61:5

PRAYER

God who was born of the flesh; who grew up in a community, and called a specific place “home” – You remind us of the importance of where we come from. You call us to care deeply for those with whom we share life: children, parents, and grandparents; teachers, business owners and workers, community and faith leaders. We give you thanks for all of them, and pray your blessings be upon them. And as we are reminded of Jesus’ anointing to bring good news to the poor and declare the year of the Lord’s favor, may we also be reminded that we too are anointed by your grace to bring good news to all communities; to all people; regardless of where we come from, or where we call home.

AMEN

SUNDAY, MARCH 12

Reflection/Questions

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. – LUKE 4.18-19

The “year of the Lord’s favor” is a reference to the year of jubilee, a Levitical law calling for the cancellation of all debts and the freedom of all slaves. While it is not known whether the year of jubilee was ever actually celebrated, the message was clear: once every generation, the Levitical codes called for the eradication of generational poverty.

1. As you reflect on the stories we read this week, what might jubilee look like for these neighbors? How might Jesus’ words resonate with Glenda and Tammy?

2. What does it mean to be “anointed” to “bring good news to the poor”?

3. Why do you think that the seeming scarcity of Glenda’s resources led to gratitude when an apparent abundance often seems to lead to fear/anxiety in others?



One of the tangible ways we can bring good news to the poor is continuing to “give up poverty” for Lent by setting aside an hour’s wage each day. Contributing funds at walkingtogetherntc.org will increase economic development in Clarksville/Red River County, and help launch the Fair Park District Entrepreneur Center in South Dallas/Fair Park. As you read in the coming week, think and pray about other ways you can live into Jesus’ ministry to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free.

MONDAY, MARCH 13

Week Three

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

- JEREMIAH 29:7

The Israelite exiles had found themselves living in a Babylonian community with significant challenges and struggles, which led them to look longingly backward or toward leaving. But God's instructions through the prophet Jeremiah called them to a new understanding of their community and their place within it: seek the welfare, the shalom or holistic flourishing, of the community and pray on its behalf.

The mission of the United Methodist Church is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." As we live out our discipleship, there should be a transformational effect on the world around us. We are in ministry with our communities so that lives might be transformed and so that our communities themselves might be transformed by the grace of Christ at work through his Church.

This week, you will read stories of people seeking the flourishing of communities they love. Pray on their behalf, asking God how you might be a part of seeking the welfare of these communities. Also, think of your own community—how can you pray and seek the same things for the places God has planted you and your church?

PRAYER

God of the prophets, lead me to the ways I can seek the shalom of my city.

AMEN





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SOUTH DALLAS/FAIR PARK
FAITH COALITION
SHARING. ADVOCATING. CREATING. INSPIRING.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

Feeding the Flock

The Faith Coalition started by the Zip Code Connection is a group who has a group of church leaders from all denominations who have come together to clean up the community, share information and really get to know each other.

Some of the pastors live here but not all do. When we come to work, we come to pastor our flock and have spent very little time in fellowship with others. This has opened up an opportunity for us to get to know one another. It's things as small as sharing calendars together so that we can work with each other, instead of against, that really can make a big difference for this community. We work so hard each week to take care of our community, but often times in competition with each other without even knowing it. One church might be feeding a block one night while the church down the street is trying to feed the same block on the same night. If we could coordinate, that block could be fed on two nights instead of one.

An example of the difference that this can make can be seen from looking at the Prayer Walk that was done

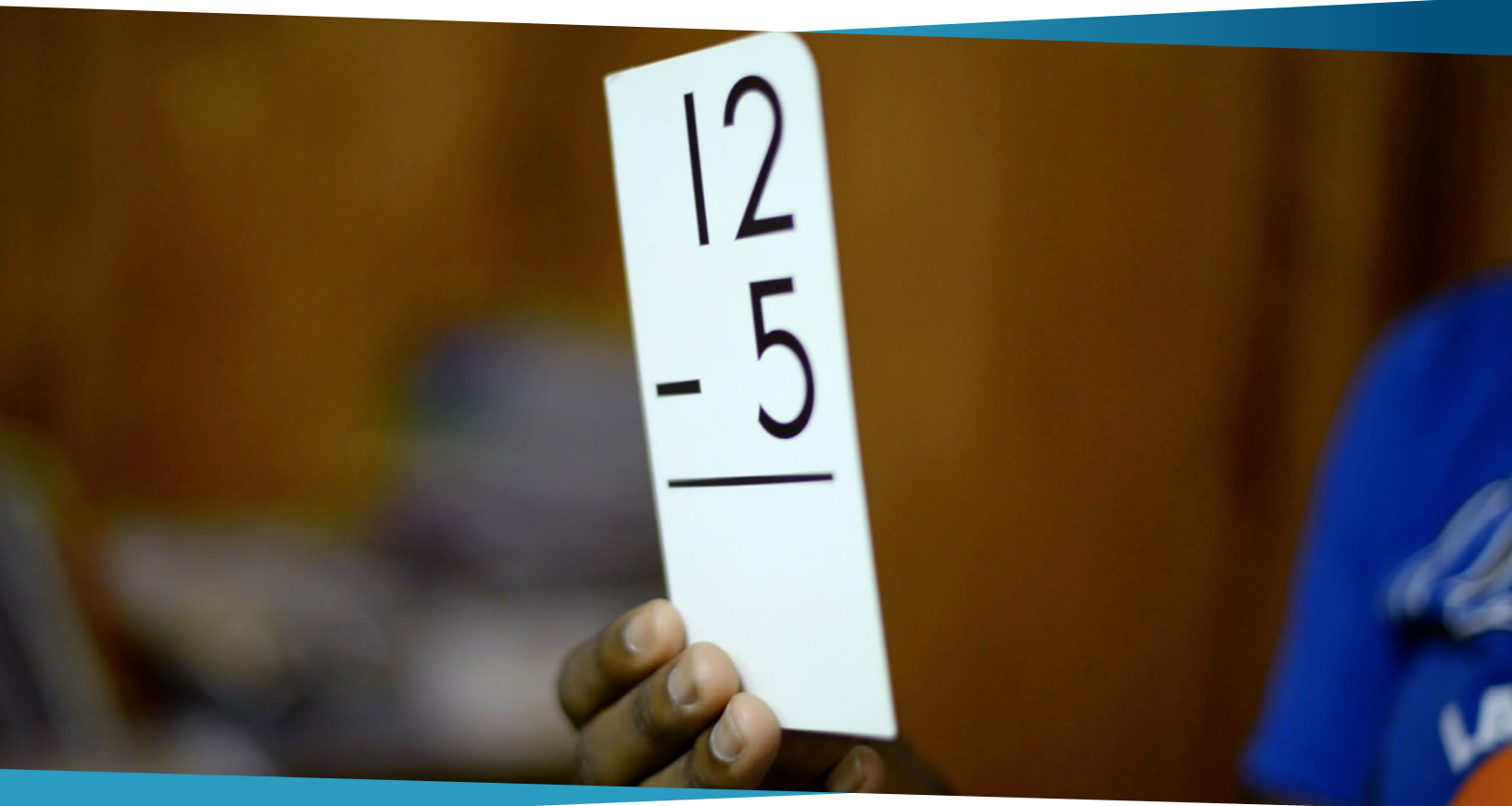
here on January 31, 2016. We fed almost 400 people at the prayer walk. Pastors of many denominations all came together with their congregations to walk down MLK. Bags of food were handed out to members of our community who were living on the streets and on our street corners. We weren't reaching out to those who sit in our pews each week, but to the least in our community who were desperate for nourishment. We fed those on the corner of our streets. We fed their stomachs and we fed their spirits.

There are pastors who were here when this community was dirt roads. They are the elders and after speaking to them they were in awe. To see all of the faith leaders in the community pray together and speak from a place of hope together, is hope for a community that does not remember seeing this kind of religious community before. No one had an ego problem and everyone was working together for the glory of God. That's what change looks like.



I am Mark. Pray with me today: Grant the faith leaders in South Dallas strength to move past their own worldly desires to be a beacon of hope and truth for a community. Unite us as one.

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. -1 CORINTHIANS 1:10



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

Children Will Feel Loved

After 17 years of teaching, I was asked by the Assistant Superintendent to develop a program to help kids in danger of dropping out of high school finish their degrees. We had a group of 18-year-old students who had been double retained in elementary school and were only at a sophomore level. It changed my entire career as far as what I understood about teenagers and compassion for the kids that grow up here; the struggles they face, their fear of not being successful and the defenses they build up out of that fear.

There is no heart as open as a teenager who is struggling and who sees they are about to be thrown into the future and they have not taken care of the business they needed to take care of. They need someone to hold their hand and help them jump into that next position. When all is said and done, I will say this is the best job I've ever had.

One of the girls in ACE was failing three classes at the first semester of her sophomore year. When she came to my program, we began with one course at a time. As we would complete half a credit we would celebrate. Every time, we celebrated each milestone. We also began to take the state mandated tests that she needed to graduate. I didn't want

to just stop there. I pulled out an old Home Economics book. We talked about finances. I was open with her. I told her about my own mistakes. She became the first in generations of her family to graduate.

She got a job but would come by and tell me that there must be more. She wanted a car, so she kept the job and went to the bank to get a car. When the housing market collapsed, she was laid off. She went straight to the bank in fear of losing her car. Because she had paid \$10 over every payment, she was ahead and they would work with her until her next job. We kept up. She had a baby, she got her CNA and all along she kept telling me that she just wanted more. She was able to get certified as a medical assistant through the Texas Workforce commission. I wrote a letter of recommendation to the local pediatrician, and now she runs the office for the clinic.

She never thought it would happen, that she would make enough money to be a provider for her family. I look back and I can only wish that I would have shown her the same love I did when she was 18, at 8 in my music class. As the elementary school principal, I don't ever forget that lesson. I don't ever want these children to not feel loved.



I am Marianne. Pray with me today: May jobs be created in this community so that our children can someday earn an honest living. May they have a lifetime of blessings in their hometown to look forward to.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. -ROMANS 8:14



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THURSDAY, MARCH 16

Find Us Laughing

Breakfast and Bingo at The Hub is a good time. White, black, rich and poor...it doesn't matter. You can find us here laughing and playing at any given breakfast. It's what we needed, a place to come together. I was amazed when we started trying to find a place to host what would become The Hub. Everything had a reason for why someone else might not come there. This is the black church or this is the white church. So-and-so doesn't like to drive this far. For whatever reason, it was a real road block to us. But The Hub is now a place where everyone is welcome.

It took some time, when we first started meeting, for people to reach out to get to know someone new. There are days when people would only sit with the five people they've always known, but now people love on each other and embrace those they haven't met before. Zip Code Connection, Regency (the company I work with), and myself stand for the same things. I see great things for us all together in the future. Our partnership is creating meaningful

ways for this community to connect. I want to keep growing. Last summer, we hosted Summer Senior Salads. This was a dinner that happened here at The Hub. We are doing baked potatoes next month for Senior Supper. We are expecting so many people that we are scrambling to figure out how to feed everyone. It's a great problem to have.

The underlying, meaningful thing that we are able to accomplish here should not be overlooked. We can help to connect people to proper healthcare, let them know their options. The average hospital stay is 72 hours. Many need much more time to recover from pneumonia or a stroke. They go home and find themselves battling all over again in the hospital a few weeks later. We can help them to get better and to stay well at Regency and The Hub is a great way to get that information out. We give them a place to find resources in the community for entertainment, community outreach and programs that make a difference in their day to day lives.



I am Rusty. Pray with me today: I want to give you praise for the good things you are doing at The Hub. May you grant me the strength and words to continue to extend the love and sense of family already in this place to those neighbors who we are still looking to reach.

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. -PSALM 147:7-8



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FRIDAY, MARCH 17

I Knew the Cowboys

I've spent my life in Alabama. I'm an only child and close to my family so when I graduated from college and told them that I wanted to go away for a year, they were unsure. I decided to join AmeriCorps VISTA, Volunteers in Service Towards America and was told I would be serving in South Dallas for one year.

In the program, we are asked to live as those we serve do. I make a wage just above the poverty line and work a second job to be able to live in my apartment and live life! It's hard to come somewhere you've never been before but it has been so rewarding.

I didn't know much about Dallas at all. I knew about the Dallas Cowboys and that JFK was shot here but I figured that couldn't be all this city had to offer. I had a few friends from around the area who seemed a bit taken back when I said I was coming to work

in South Dallas. I heard it was rough and even dangerous, but I wanted to come in with an open mind and really experience the community from my own perspective.

I work with WINS (Working in Neighborhoods Strategically) and have learned so much. I'm an outsider to this community but I don't feel like one. When I call home to tell my parents about where I am, I talk a lot about a community that is hopeful and really wants to better itself from within. It's hard to better yourself from within without the right resources though and that's why organizations like WINS, Zip Code Connection and FRI are so important. This community needs strength and access to things like jobs, transportation and representation to be able to grow. Leadership from organizations like these provides clear direction to help the neighborhood succeed.



I am Steven. Pray with me today: Lord, give me the strength to do your work in South Dallas. May I help this community build to a better future for all of those that live here.

I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. -EPHESIANS 4:1-2



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SATURDAY, MARCH 18

His Eyes Came to Life

I did not decide to become a nurse until my 30s. I could be a nurse in a bigger town with more people and more money but I want to be here. I remember sitting at my desk a few years back and thinking, I just want to help people. When this job at the Lennox Health Resource Center came open, I knew I could help the people of Clarksville.

Here, we connect people in the community to health resources. So many are plagued by the fear of just paying for a regular doctor's visit that they just won't go. We are able to help them get set up on programs like the Preventable Hospitalization program that allows for health care needs at an affordable rate. We help people fill out confusing insurance forms and work to connect them with resources that will provide funding and support as they work towards good health for them and for their families. There are only 3 doctors in town and there is not a pediatrician. That can be difficult for families just trying to keep up with well visits.

I can't always help. Just this morning I had a woman with cancer come in the door. She had run through her resources, but is not through treatment yet. She needs help

and we just don't have the resources to pull her through. That is a hard day. It is hard to come home knowing that there just aren't enough funds to help everyone.

But then there are days when you know you have done enough. There is a church in town that gives away \$100 gift cards for food at Christmas time. They asked me to help select a recipient. At first, I couldn't imagine picking one person. We all need food. But I chose a little older gentleman in the community. When I gave it to him, his eyes came to life. I can't really put into words what happened, but it was the most beautiful sight that I have seen. It was a look of true gratitude and pure joy. On the days when there are not enough funds or someone in real pain comes in the door and we can't help them because we cannot distribute pain meds, I remember the joy I saw that day.

There is hope. This town needs jobs, industry and easy access to healthcare. There is a hospital that was shut down here, but there is talk that it may be reopening. It would be a really great thing for this town.



I am Tammy. Pray with me today: Let me help someone today. Let me be your light to all of those who come through our doors as this town partners together to find love, beauty and strength.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven. -MATTHEW 5:16

PRAYER

God of hope, we give you thanks for the dreams you have for our communities. Help us to stand in the gap between your dreams and the nightmares we often see in reality. Give us courage, strength, and wisdom to bridge the divides that separate us from living into the fullness of your shalom.

AMEN



SUNDAY, MARCH 19


Reflection/Questions

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. – JEREMIAH 29.11

As we get to know Zip Codes 75215 and 75426 and look around our own communities, we might hear stories of struggle or systemic failure, or a longing for hope and holistic opportunity. Yet we also remember that God has great dreams for our communities. As Jeremiah spoke to Israelite exiles in Babylon, God’s plans are “for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Like so much of God’s work in our world, these plans can be accomplished in cooperation with the transformational ministry of the people of God.

1. There are so many obstacles to opportunity, particularly for those growing up in zip codes 75215 and 75426. How can the Zip Code Connection work with the community to remove these obstacles and create opportunity for the next generation?

2. How can the faith community in your zip code grow in its unity? Can you identify a need that the faith community could be in ministry with together?

 As we pray for discernment about the ways we can seek the shalom of our cities, let us also continue to “give up poverty” for lent by setting aside an hour’s wage each day to support the ministries of the Zip Code Connection. **Visit walkingtogetherntc.org to contribute.**

MONDAY, MARCH 20

Week Four

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' – LUKE 10.25-28

Who is our neighbor? And what does it mean to truly love our neighbors as ourselves? In the parable of the good Samaritan, the one who no one would have expected to care for the stranger was the very one who reached out and offered help. He then went on to ensure that the person in need would continue to be cared for. What might it look like for us to engage in the kinds of ministries that not only lend a helping hand in a moment of crisis or despair – but continue to ensure that our neighbors are cared for? Wouldn't it look more like partnerships and ongoing relationships than simple community service projects? Wouldn't it look more like advocating for our children in our public school systems than simply offering a backpack full of school supplies once a year? Wouldn't it look like creating communities with ample job opportunities that pay a living wage so families can take care of their basic needs?

This week you'll read the stories of people who are working to create real transformation in their communities. They invite you to join them in that work...

PRAYER

Lord, you have called me to love you with my whole heart – and to love my neighbor as myself. Help me to see my neighbor. Help me to show radical hospitality to your children in need. Help me to love you, by loving your people.

.A M E N





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TUESDAY, MARCH 21

Unite to Say No

Want to come to South Dallas? Come on down. Not as a savior but as a brother and sister in Christ. This community wants that. We want people who want to come down and partner with us as brothers and sisters in Christ. We need more people in our community to advocate at City Hall for more police officers. Not just patrol, but to be community officers who know us. We need people to advocate for children. What does it look like if leaders from churches in Highland Park, South Dallas, and White Rock all walk into a DISD school board meeting to say...we demand more for our kids in this community of South Dallas. We support all of our children. Children need school books, teachers who get paid better. People move for better schools.

My wife is in education and we have some challenges in South Dallas around education. Beyond a lack of resources, we have a cycle to break. Parents don't know the opportunities available to help their kids. Some of our parents can't read so they can't begin to help their children until they get help themselves. It's hard to talk about education when you have kids that

are coming to school just to eat. They're hungry and that's where they find food. You have mamas who are lacking in education and don't find self-worth within. Those parents need love and help so they can pour love into their children. I know that it seems like this is too much to think about. I serve a God that parted a sea for slaves to walk on dry land. I think God can help give parents joy. It comes through us. We have to provide food, training and stability so that we can provide education.

Our communities need to be cleaned up. Our children should not have to see people almost dead on a park bench from an overdose. Just the other day, a Pastor here had to get on the news to compel the city to come out and clean up under one of our bridges. Several homeless people had been living there and since they had no restroom, they made a pile of waste. The Pastor had been calling the city for weeks to come clean up and with no response, we were forced to go to the news. We shouldn't have to go to the news to get help from our own city. We need our brothers and sisters to unite with us to say no to things like this.



I am Mark. Pray with me today: Be with our children. Be with their parents. Help all of us to show love and support to those who most need it in our communities.

The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbors as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. - MARK 12:31



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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

Children Will Feel Loved

While dating, we were part of a think tank that studied a book called *When Helping Hurts*. It was a transformative time for our relationship and ultimately the work that God would invite us into as a family. Life in Austin, and then Denver, was full of creative peers and regular feasts of engaging opportunities. More significantly, we had a cadre of fellow believers that we lived on mission with to support us and serve alongside. However, we were longing to make a lasting commitment to a community.

Aware of Clarksville's rich history, diversity, and stark poverty, I sought out an artist-in-residency with the Red River County Historical Society project in the spring of 2014. It was at that time that Lynn Parsons and I met and she shared Bishop McKee's quest to end poverty and the vision of the Zip Code Connection. My husband and I had prayed about ministering in Clarksville for almost a year previously to our encounter with Lynn, but had no idea by what means. It was obvious that The Zip Code Connection

was our answer and God was leading.

The transition was and has not been easy. We moved our family to a place that most would see as broken: old houses in need of repair, a median age of 70 and only one licensed daycare in the county. In a place where we tend to feel like outsiders and strangers, The Hub Community Center launched by Zip Code last year, has become a place where we find connection. In a place where the spirit of poverty tends to segment its residents by age, race and natives/outsiders, a central place of hospitality is critical.

Every day we wake up to search for a little way forward. Maybe we can't bring everyone to the same table, but maybe today we can bring a few to the same room. We aren't here for the short term. We are not here to stick a few leaves on the tree and hope that the sign of a little green is enough. We're here to make sure the tree bears fruit.

I'm Melinda. Pray with me today: I seek to find a closer relationship with God. As I work to connect others, may I not lose the beauty of my own relationship. May we build a faith community for our family.

I'm Ryan. Pray with me today: I pray for humility. It is not I that has the power to transform, but it is God, and through God may I be in ministry with my own community. I pray for wisdom. Let me see the root of the causes of poverty and not just the veil. May we all see God in each other.



Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, "Here am I; send me!" -ISAIAH 6:8



THURSDAY, MARCH 23

It's a Job. That's Enough.

"I'm not one to talk too much. I've lived my life and made my mistakes. I grew up right here in South Dallas and in Oak Cliff. My story is the same as many around these parts, I suppose. I lost a brother in high school to gang violence and life wasn't always perfect.

I'm married now and have a son and a daughter. I can't say that I've always had hope in my life but Boots on the Ground with Zip Code Connection has given me hope. You see, this part time job isn't just some job. It is a job and it is hope for my family.

Each time I go out into South Dallas, I know there is a chance that I will bring hope to someone else. It's not just a survey of how life is going in their home and I'm not someone who will never return. We are community building community and my listening ear provides hope that there is something more tomorrow.

My hope comes from getting up each day. I have a job. I can provide for my family. I'm not on the streets.



I am LeKendric. Pray with me today: Lord, thank you for the gift of a job. May those that I meet in their homes or on the street find hope in your glory and grace.

Though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong,
for the Lord holds us by the hand. -PSALM 37:24



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FRIDAY, MARCH 24

Delightfully Unconnected

I have been in Clarksville my whole life. I see the broken spirit—the spirit of poverty. When you drive into town, you see houses that you can imagine were once beautiful. Each home is a bleak reminder of a broken day of glory.

Working at The Hub, the Zip Code Connection Community Center of sorts, I've learned that there are over 150 resources available for people in need in this county. It would be a stretch to say that ten percent of people here have any clue that these resources exist. We're putting the information in a place where people can find access to better healthcare, better education and a way forward.

This community might look a little like it is in the wrong decade. When you walk into many events there, you find a separate world. Whites at one table, blacks at another. Some have lived in the same place their whole life and never exchanged even a hello. This idea that

we're all children of God only applies to their round table of 10.

People point fingers. So-and-so should be the first to come talk to me. So-and-so should be fixing this, not me. Some days I want to tell them they are right. But then there are moments when I see a connection, small and weak, but a connection. There is one volunteer we frequently work with who has what you might call a critical eye. Everything was wrong. Food was too cold or the other table is too loud. When she signed up to lead a new program, we were all worried about how critical she would be. How was her negativity going to help this take flight? But we loved her through it, and at the awards banquet she was recognized for her hard work and dedication to this project. She transformed into someone who wanted to be part of this community and has stepped forward to lead other important initiatives. She may still gripe some, but she took a step forward. She reached out and connected. That's a win.



I am Tammy. Pray with me today: Dear Lord, I need your strength. I need to do my job today in a way that the community can see a glimmer of hope that I am going to make a positive difference, that we are going to make a difference. There is hope in you.

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. -1 CORINTHIANS 10:17



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SATURDAY, MARCH 25

Don't Believe Everything

I'm the Deputy Chief of Community Prosecution in Community Courts in the City of Dallas, the Pastor of Victory Baptist Church, and recently appointed Municipal Court Judge for the City of Dallas. South Dallas is home to me. My wife is a principal here and my kids are being educated here.

The biggest thing I want people to know about my community is don't believe everything you see on the media. Sometimes you see Red Bird Mall or South Oak Cliff being labeled as South Dallas, but that's not it. Maybe the only time people see South Dallas is for the State Fair of Texas. This neighborhood is not as dangerous as you think. Our crime stats are lower than some other areas in Dallas. This community was affected by drugs in the late 70s and 80s and it devastated this community. It's not the only community. Look at places like Washington DC in the same time frame. Many think that the addiction is really the root of the devastation, but a lot of the reason our community is still hurting is because of the arrests made in the time. Many of the men were taken out of the community and as they come back, are coming back with a scarlet letter and little formal experience in the real world. Ten years later, adjustment is hard. Destroying family units is hard.

I don't think the government can put that back together. It is the people of the Lord. If government could do it, I think we would have seen it by now. Many times when the government has come in, it has just made things worse. Think about slavery, the ending of Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movements...that, friends, was the church and the church can change lives.

I want outsiders to know that this is a community of good people. Good people that need some help. We are proud and we want to do the best. We need churches to educate and help us to advocate for our community. We need to restore homes, help our elderly citizens, and help our children who are in failing schools and need guidance. We need male role models. There are lots of kids here without strong male figures in their lives to guide them and show them what a father looks like. We need males from the churches with a strong moral compass to provide faith leadership and mentorship to our children. There are so many possibilities to help here. It is not about color, class or money. It's about love. Do you have a heart? Are you the same person that Jesus saved and are you a reflection of that same saving grace to give to someone else? If you can bestow that same grace that Jesus gave to you, you can change a generation.



I am Mark. Pray with me today: Lord, help me be your child in this world. May I show others the same saving grace that you have afforded. May I be an agent of change in your world to turn eyes to you.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may
take refuge in the shadow of your wings. -PSALM 36:7

PRAYER

Faithful God, may we be faithful to you. May we continue to grow in our love of you with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind. And when we see your children in need, may we love them as we love our own families – through our compassion, our resources, our advocacy, and our solidarity.

AMEN



SUNDAY, MARCH 26


Reflection/Questions

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' – LUKE 10.30-37

At first glance, the communities of South Dallas/Fair Park and Clarksville/Red River County may seem overcome with problems. But a closer look reveals two communities filled with loving people who want to see their neighborhoods thriving. They want their children to have all the opportunities that any child has. They want them to be safe, and proud to call their neighborhood home. As Mark points out, the challenges faced by the residents of South Dallas are real – but he challenges us to get involved in overcoming them. As the story of the good Samaritan reminds us, faithfulness to loving God also means loving our neighbors.

1. The parable of the good Samaritan ends with Jesus acknowledging that "the one who showed mercy" is the one who was faithful. But the Samaritan did more than show mercy in the moment – he also ensured the stranger would be cared for beyond their initial encounter. What is the difference between acts of mercy, and working for justice? How can your church be an advocate for the kinds of changes Mark wants to see in South Dallas (more community police officers, more resources for DISD schools, better pay for teachers, a cleaner, safer city for all residents)?

2. Melinda and Ryan moved to a community that many people see as "broken." But they saw it as opportunity to be in ministry with their neighbors. How might your church engage in ministry with your neighbors, rather than ministry "to" or "for" them?

 Giving up an hour's wage each week, and giving those funds to the Zip Code Connection's ministries that empower and transform lives, is one way we can all practice loving our neighbors throughout this Lenten journey.

Contribute today at walkingtogetherntc.org.

MONDAY, MARCH 27

Week Five

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' – MATTHEW 25:34-40

Families come in all shapes and sizes. In the book of Ephesians, Paul tells us that we are all adopted as children of God – we are all siblings! This is challenging, of course, since we don't often treat each other as family. When Jesus spoke of the coming kingdom in the book of Matthew, one of the few moments where he speaks of eternal judgment, he frames it in terms of how we treat each other. Status, wealth, and moral purity all pale in comparison with the importance of how we treat "the least of these who are members of [our] family."

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25:35) How can we do these things? Is simply giving food to the hungry or welcoming a stranger enough? What if we asked why someone is hungry in a world full of abundance, or why the stranger is unwelcome when so many are ready to be hospitable? What if feeding the hungry includes addressing the root causes of why hunger exists? What if these solutions can only be found as communities coming together to solve these complex problems?

This week you will read stories of communities understanding that they are family in ways other than sharing a last name. You will also read stories about how fear can paralyze us, and blind us to the abundance that surrounds us. As you read their stories this week, consider how Jesus reveals the possibilities for abundance in our world—abundance found in the relationships we cultivate with our neighbors.

PRAYER

God who parents us all, you have shown us how we are all related. You have revealed the abundance that surrounds us, and how that abundance can serve to alleviate the pain of our most vulnerable and hurting siblings. Breathe courage into us to forge new relationships. Grant to us the perspective to notice our siblings who are hurting and in need.

AMEN





TUESDAY, MARCH 28

Hope in the Garden

I used to pick pecans out front of the Bethlehem Center. They have some really large trees and I enjoyed the activity and the shade. One Saturday I decided to bring the kids up to the center for breakfast. George Battle was there and started to tell us about all of the programs.

At some point, he mentioned that they were starting a community garden. I thought that would be a good fit for me and something to do. My mom and great aunt raised me in the country for part of my childhood, so I had learned a lot about growing things.

The Star Community Garden is a great example of partnerships doing good things in this community. After initially getting interested in the garden with George, I decided to become the person to oversee the garden. It was a labor of love and a lot of people came together to make it happen in the community. I remember Mr. Glen who worked with master gardeners and helped us to get funds from AT&T to

build our shed. I remember the volunteer who came over to build the fence around the garden. We've had lots of great community volunteers. Before we even planted a single plant, we had people who built the bed and brought in the dirt.

The children love it. Playing in the water and playing in the dirt is a great activity for them and is something different than they are used to. The staff at Bethlehem Center even got them their own little hose and shovels! At the end of the day we also get to see the things that grow. It's important to see that hard work pays off.

The garden is a symbol of hope for this community. I love my neighbors, we watch out for each other and it is good to have safe places to come together to celebrate our community. The Bethlehem Center is a great place for us all to come together and I'm thankful that there are more and more opportunities for South Dallas to come out together.



I am Glenda. Pray with me today: I pray for God to give me strength to get through the trials and tribulations in my own life. I put my trust in him. I thank him for the strength to get through each day and for places in our community where we can stay busy and be positive.

He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." -EXODUS 33: 14



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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29

The More We Get Out There...

Clarksville is a historic community. As you drive into town you see the sign: "Established in 1833." It is not hard to imagine the once beautiful buildings and the great stories that must have once happened here, but it's just not that anymore. It's run down, it looks tired and it feels heavy. Poverty isn't just about a dollar sign. Poverty is about connection or rather, the lack of connection.

Healthcare is a problem here. It is 40 miles to the nearest hospital. You have a tooth ache, no big deal, except that there is no dentist here. There is not even somewhere to get glasses. Among those most affected by this crisis are the seniors. God put it on my heart one day in 2003 to be the one to start the change. I started Red River Charities. We are a non-profit that helps to get the elderly to

the doctor. Many are on Medicare or Medicaid and have to go where they are referred. This can be a long drive and most couldn't make it without help.

They say that knowledge is power and in this community there is a huge lack of knowledge about the resources available. Zip Code Connection has come in to help us educate our community on what is available to help them lead better lives. Feel better.... look better.... smile more and connect more. It is in those connections that we will slowly climb back into a community of love and engagement. Working together, we make connections. The more we get out there and the more people recognize us, the better life will be in this community.



I am John. Pray with me today: Lord, give us strength to do your work. Give me the strength to be strong for others. It is through my relationship with you that I can bring others to find the hope in their day. May the people in my car feel better today.

Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up.

-PROVERBS 12:25



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THURSDAY, MARCH 30

Fears Can Be Overcome

Children need to be loved. Children need support. Children need to know that their fears can be overcome. I see it every day.

One-hundred percent of our children are on free and reduced lunch. As a school, you must have at least 70% of your children that will qualify to apply to extend the program to the entire school. If I remember correctly, at the time we applied we were around 90%. I don't know what that says about the poverty level of our families, but it does say something about our limited resources.

There is a little boy that I saw in my office at least three times a week. Neither of us were surprised to find him there, and while I knew there were issues he

needed to work through, I didn't have the resources to help him, and his family didn't have those resources. We have a school counselor, but state paper work and an overly full calendar prevent us from being able to offer mental health services to our students in the way they need them.

Through a graduate program, we were able to have Ryan, who now also works for the Zip Code Connection, come in and do some mental health work with some of our students. This little boy was one of the first I sent his way. He went from being in my office 3 times a week to twice in an entire 6 months. I don't know what happened with him and Ryan, but I do know that someone to listen and someone to care goes a long way.



I am Marianne. Bless the children of Clarksville. May they find hope in their community for a bright future and a promising life!

The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. -MATTHEW 7:25



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FRIDAY, MARCH 31

Everyone is Human

Put your hands in it. It is one thing to send money to a cause or to hear about a cause, but it is far more rewarding for all involved if everyone is reaching in and digging deep. A community can see real change then.

The Dallas Bethlehem Center was a community center when I was growing up. I'm happy to see it alive and vibrant now. With its programs for children, Breakfast and Books, a food pantry and a community garden, there is always something going on here for those who are a part of South Dallas. Putting my hands into something that put in to me is more than rewarding, it is hope for the next round of children.

I work a lot in the food bank at the Bethlehem Center, which is located in South Dallas. We service 300-400 families and it is a huge necessity for those living close by. There aren't grocery stores in this area. The only place that is close by are corner stores that are overpriced. The Bethlehem Center is a food distribution partner of Crossroads Community Services. We are able to give nutritionally based food items to families based on the number and ages of those being

served, once a month. For our seniors, this is huge. They are not mobile and can hardly make it two blocks, much less to a bus to get to a grocery store. Some of the staff and volunteers here go pick them up on their week, just to make sure they get food.

I also serve breakfast to kids here on Sunday mornings. I will never forget the day a little girl came up to me. She didn't look well and was on the brink of tears. I asked her what was wrong and she said she was hungry. Breakfast was over and lunch was still a bit away so I shared a bag of chips I had with her. She ran to the corner and ate them faster than I had ever seen someone eat. I knew she needed more and I found it. Community helping community...it's so important. I'm blessed to be a stay at home mom but this is like a job to me. I can't imagine not giving to this place.

I think people live in fear. In fear of those who look different, talk different or live different. But you don't need to have fear. Everyone is human. Just speak to each other, "Hi, how you doing?" Come see us in South Dallas and say hello.



I am Shawana. Pray with me today: May we rise out of our own fears. May we see a face on the street we don't know and love them as Jesus taught us to love.

Do not let your hearts be troubled... In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. -JOHN 14:1-3



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SATURDAY, APRIL 1

Huddled Around

I came to Clarksville from Dallas to take care of my Grandfather and Grandmother. I did not have a plan to stay, but met my husband and 34 years later...here I am.

The people here are friendly. It's a small town with a lack of opportunities for work. Good people, good school...of course a good Boys and Girls Club...but I wouldn't advise anyone to move here unless they are retiring. There is just no work.

I work for the school as an aide and I am the Director of the Boys and Girls Club, which meets at The Hub Community Center. I have 68 kids in and out of the Boys and Girls Club. There is nothing for them to do in Clarksville. There isn't a movie theater to go get out of the heat in, there isn't a place to go and play. Without the Club, they wouldn't have a chance to

escape the little town to experience the world.

In our old building we were very limited on space. It was old, and only had one room. I couldn't have 68 kids there because it was just too small. It was hot in the summer and cold in the winter. We had two stoves. In the winter you could find us all huddled around one just trying to stay warm. That is where Melinda (the Zip Code Connection) found us when she first came to town.

I remember when she came to tell me that they had found a building to make The Hub and asked if I would like to bring the Boys and Girls Club over. It was so special. Now I can divide children up by age appropriate groups, take more kids and we have a place to go and eat in the building. Space changed everything for us.



I am Mina. Pray with me today: Lord, may the families that live and breathe in our community wake up to your love and grace. May our children hear your word and may their parents find guidance in you. Let me be your voice to those tiny hearts that may often feel that they cannot find you.

Peace I leave you with; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. -JOHN 14:27

PRAYER

God of abundance, help us leverage the resources of the family you have provided for us; help us engage in solutions that cure the sources of poverty, rather than simply treating its symptoms. Help us see our siblings in need, rather than taking the more comfortable route of not noticing their pain.

AMEN



SUNDAY, APRIL 2

Reflection/Questions

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

- MARK 11:12-13

In Matthew 25, Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, provide clothes to the naked, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. But if we only hand out food or clothes or care, and don't examine how societies create unseen barriers for those in poverty, then we will be like the fig tree, cursed by Jesus, that has no fruit in Mark 11! When Zip Code Connection originated, it was called the Zip Code Project—this was problematic because the word "project" over-simplified the work that needed to be done. Eradicating poverty can't be solved with simple solutions.

1. What are the barriers (seen and unseen) that prevent some of our neighbors from having the abundant life God wants for them? If it were as simple as working harder—why hasn't that worked in so many cases?

2. What can the church do for the hungry beyond food pantries, or for the naked beyond clothing closets? What's the difference between "project," vs. "connection?"



As we work to participate in ministries of connection, let us continue our Lenten commitment to setting aside an hour's wage each week to support the ministries of the Zip Code Connection.

MONDAY, APRIL 3

Week Six

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. - 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13

Last week, we saw that Jesus' call to be in ministry with the "least of these" had to do with the fact that they were (like us) children of God. We are all siblings. This week, 1 Corinthians 12 reveals that not only are we siblings—we are members of the same body. Some of us are hands, others feet; some are eyes, or noses. We all have unique gifts and abilities and perspectives to bear in our world. In the readings for this week, you will find examples of many people who have unique gifts and experiences (members on the school board, in public service, as leaders of non-profits, or experts in health care. They are all members of the body with different God-given gifts to share and uniquely participate in what will strike at the root of poverty in the 75215 and 75426 zip codes.

PRAYER

Creative God, you have made us all differently. With all our strengths and weaknesses together, we can reach heights exponentially greater than if we were alone. Help us learn to see differences as blessings, rather than barriers.

AMEN





TUESDAY, APRIL 4

Pride in the Street

There are clear signs that this community has suffered some hits along the way. When you drive in to South Dallas, you will see vacant buildings and lots, deterioration around the streets, and overgrowth. It might seem to the outsider that there is a lack of pride of ownership. The truth is, a lot of that is due to property owners who don't live here. They are in California so they don't care that their building looks bad for the neighborhood. It's hard on residents who are out mowing their yards just like you and I, only to be next door to a lot where the owner hasn't ever seen it and does nothing to keep it up.

I came to South Dallas in February. Since I got here I have been working with Jay Scroggins at WINS, George Battle with Zip Code Connection and other community leaders to get a Public Improvement District for South Dallas. People told us that it couldn't be done. How were the people of this community supposed to pay additional taxes to help

their neighborhood, and why on earth would they vote for it? But we worked with the citizens that live here and they want to improve their neighborhood. The PID will allow for clean up on those vacant lots, additional improvements to real estate and land and many other beautification projects that will help this neighborhood have pride in its streets. We hope to also have more courtesy officers in the neighborhood. If the officers can get to know our people, we can all feel safer here.

I hope to work in public service for a long time and this opportunity in South Dallas has taught me so much about the importance of community and the importance of the career I have chosen. I hope to come back in 10 years and see that the neighborhood has gotten the attention it deserves. Pretty streets with big, well kept trees and children playing in the street. I hope people move here. It's a great place to live with tons of potential.



I am Steven. Pray with me today: Let us find the beauty in our neighborhoods, neighbors and strangers. Give us strength to do the work in South Dallas that needs to be done to support a community working to better itself.

Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you. -LUKE 8:39



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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

Community Support

I work for a home health care system here in Clarksville. My main goal is to tell people what is available to them to help ease life and make the later years enjoyable. I saw a woman the other day who was on her 29th day home after having a stroke. She had no idea that Medicare would have paid for her to be in a nursing facility to do rehab to help her to get better. The catch, Medicare only pays up until the 30th day. People just don't know these things and no matter how much that we have used traditional methods such as billboards and TV ads to get the message out, it just wasn't working.

I began to realize that Clarksville needed a place for senior adults to come together to learn about what is available to them and to spend time in community and fellowship together. I heard Lynn and Melinda (from the Zip Code Connection) were working on putting a center together and I called them. I wanted to do anything I could do to help to make it happen.

We talked about getting started in a church but ran into some road blocks. People were loyal to their church.

They would come to our activities if it was their church. They were divided by denomination, race and proximity to their homes, so we really needed something that could be neutral.

A member of the community that owns an Inn had the building that you now know as The Hub. It was great and a real God find for us! I can have a dinner with 30-60 seniors from all over the county and from all walks of life in the same room. Not only do they get to participate in the senior activities, but being at The Hub exposes them to programs like Boys and Girls Club and AA. It opens the opportunities to be a part of the community!

We host a Breakfast and Bingo for senior adults in the town each week. I will never forget the first one! Melinda, myself and one other person sat around the table just hoping for a friend. A little patience and a lot of word of mouth and we host a full house each week now. It all comes down to community supporting community. We do that here.



I am Rusty. Pray with me today: God, I know that people love each other, they just need reminding sometimes. Help me to show them love so that they might show love to others.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. -ACTS 4:32



THURSDAY, APRIL 6

Sometimes Days are Hard

I hope our children can hear this message: Come up out of the streets. All there is in the streets is death. I don't want to watch another drive-by shooting on the corner. I want to see our children getting an education. I want to see them in places like the Bethlehem Center, where there is hope for something better.

Violence is a problem here. It's not safe like it used to be. Kids can't just go out for the day and roam the streets. On top of violence in the streets we have animal problems. Many have heard about dogs that are running around, but we also have a raccoon problem. There are five in a drain across the street from my house. I also have two opossums in my backyard. No one is helping us deal with the problem and I can't let my children out to play for fear that they will get bit by something. Sometimes days are hard. Sometimes when I think that things can't get more difficult, we are hit with another challenge in life. That happens everywhere and it is a great reminder of the humanity of all of us. I lost my sister, and we struggled to find the funds for a proper burial. My mother is ill and due to economic circumstance I may have to move out of this neighborhood that I love. Tough stuff is a part of all of our lives. Turn to the Man upstairs. He's going to help me and anyone else get through the hard times.

Outsiders are welcome. It is fun to get to know churches that come back again and again to interact with the community. Our own churches aren't so involved here, at least from what I see, so I am thankful to get to know other people of faith. We have volunteers here that also help with the Food Pantry that is at Bethlehem Center. I have seen George drive groceries to a community member that couldn't come get their items. It makes a difference in a community.

In ten years, I expect it will look a lot different. There will be new construction and better places to live. It will give the children here more pride in their community and hopefully a better chance at a good education. I want for my babies to say, "We broke the cycle." Families need support and I think that the community will continue to get more and more assistance. When I was in school, we didn't have Truancy Officers that cared if we were in school or not. It's good for parents today to be informed about what is happening with their kids and for the kids to know that someone cares if they're at school or not. But I hope that places like the Bethlehem Center stay around in the change. I want my babies to be able to come back to celebrate a place that gave them happy memories. I want for them to be able to say, "Remember Mr. George, Ms. Fran and Mr. Brandon...we had so many great times with them!"



I am Glenda. Pray with me today: I pray for world peace. I pray for peace in my community. I pray for all of the people and families that have lost loved ones to violence here. I pray for those incarcerated. I pray for the children. May we all find peace.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. -JAMES 3:18



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FRIDAY, APRIL 7

I Was on My Negative Then, I'm on My Positive Now

I grew up in Garland, but most of my family was in South Dallas. My cousins were my best friends and they lived there and my best friend was there. I graduated from Rockwall High School and moved to South Dallas to join them. I say that I was on my negative back then.

There was a crack epidemic in the neighborhood. I got involved in a lot of stuff that I shouldn't have and I was good at it. My family and friends died during that time. My cousins were killed. My best friend served time and was killed in prison. His 17-year-old brother was killed. People die in the neighborhood.

Black on black violence is the root of most of the death but its cause, the problem, is poverty. If you're broke, and you're a man and have a family to feed, but there are no jobs then you find that it will put you in a really bad mood. Add guns to that and....

I did time, and when I returned to South Dallas I had a son. That changed everything. I got involved in my community and have been serving ever since. I created my own non-profit called HipHop Government. We do work with a lot of the organizations in the neighborhood and have been for a while. When Bishop McKee said that the North Texas Conference was going to end poverty in South Dallas, it was what we needed to push harder to do our work and to believe, really believe, that we could do better for the future.

There is a lot of systematic poverty stemming from generations of bad habits and turmoil. No one can just walk in and fix it. It has to come from within the community. When the Bishop made the declaration out loud, it gave those who are working from within hope that it is possible to rebuild. It's a blessing to have the heart of the Bishop and the church to join us from within.



I am Jay, pray with me today: May the hearts of all of those who pray for the work that we are doing with Zip Code Connection be united in a greater community of God's love and grace. I need God's love to share God's love.

He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." -LUKE 21: 3-4



SATURDAY, APRIL 8

Sometimes Days are Hard

I've served for 9 years on the school board and am completing my last year in this term as the head of the board. I take a lot of pride in being loyal, faithful and determined for students to be successful here. I got in to this because I wanted to be a positive role model for the staff, teachers and students here. Sometimes you see people join boards because they have an agenda and are out to get something, but I just really wanted to serve the community that served me so well as a student. I want what is best for these schools. I can be a person to listen to students. I can share where I have come from and push them to go even further than I have.

We are small, but the schools are good. We may not have all of the opportunities that large schools have but we have kids that work hard and get great college opportunities to play ball and go to college. We have

5 kids that graduated from here who are playing collegiate football, women who are playing collegiate volleyball and a graduate on a track scholarship. Being a small town doesn't mean that we don't excel.

We want our children to be here and to be raised by this great community. We need jobs to be able to do that. Parents are driving long commutes and taking their children out of district to make the logistics work.

When you visit Clarksville, I want you to see that our community is full of love. We care about our community and we want you to be a part of the love that we have here. When the football team goes deep in the playoffs, we go deep in the playoffs. The community all comes together to support one another. Come see what we have to offer...it may be old but there is a lot of beauty in the history.



I am Robert. Pray with me today: I come to you, thankful for the blessings that you have given me and my family. May you help the students in this community know you. May they open their hearts to your love and your guidance each day.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe. -HEBREWS 12:28

PRAYER

God of truth, show us the ways that lead to actual restoration. Show us the ways that lead to lasting peace. Show us the ways that we can help with humility, wisdom, and compassion rather than pride, arrogance, and false judgment. Help us be agents of hope in our communities.

AMEN



SUNDAY, APRIL 9

Reflection/Questions

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. —1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-20


It's hard to look at someone else's success and not covet it. This is, of course, dangerous because doing this causes us to ignore our own unique and flourishing path God has for us. Flipping that concept over, it's also hard to not want those whom we believe have "less" than us to have what we have. Know what we know. Enjoy what we enjoy. Far too often when seeking to be in ministry with the poor, we project our own idea of abundance on others, rather than learning from their wisdom and experience the best ways in which to serve.

Truly lasting solutions to poverty of all kinds require humility. As Paul says, "if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? ... If all were a single member, where would the body be?" If those whom we seek to be in ministry with became like us, where would their God-given essence be? If impoverished communities like those the Zip Code Connection serves became like the suburbs from which people came to help... where would their culture and unique offerings to society be? Rev. Larry James of CitySquare in Dallas describes this best with the title (and content) of his book, *The Wealth of the Poor: How Valuing Every Neighbor Restores Hope in Our Cities*. Let's restore hope in all our communities by breaking down the walls that prevent eyes from being fully eyes, or hands from being fully hands.

- 1. Instead of inserting our wealth into the poverty of others, how can we work on the poverty that creates barriers between the intrinsic wealth we all have as humans?

- 2. What are the unique gifts you have to offer that few people around you have? How have you failed to notice these kinds of unique gifts in others?

- 3. In what ways does our own wealth can impede our ability to solve the problems poverty creates?

 As we continue to expand our understanding of what wealth is, and how we are all unique in our part of society, let us share in the effort of building up resources and wealth for others by setting aside an hour's wage each week of Lent to support the ministries of the Zip Code Connection. **Contribute today at walkingtogetherntc.org.**

MONDAY, APRIL 10

Holy Week

'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' – JOHN 13.34-35

As we begin Holy Week and look toward the Cross, we are reminded that Jesus spent his final hours with his closest friends. He ate with them, and then he washed their feet. He did this as an example of servant leadership – ministry with. After he had done this, he gave them a new commandment to love one another, "just as I have loved you." As you read the stories of Mark and Brandon this week, and then journey with your faith community through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, consider the following:

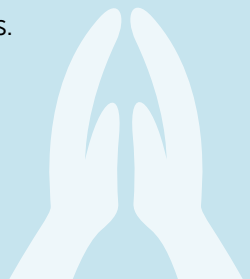
How can I live into the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples as they shared their final meal together? How can my church follow Jesus' model of servant leadership in ways that address the real needs of real people in North Texas? How might Jesus be calling me in this final week of Lent to make a commitment and sacrifice of my time, my resources, my voice, my partnership, my friendship – so that my neighbors, my siblings in the family of faith, might know that I am a true disciple?

PRAYER

I want Jesus to walk with me, I want Jesus to walk with me; all along my pilgrim journey, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me. Amen. (African American Spiritual)

Walking with Jesus means walking in solidarity with those who suffer. Giving of your time, talents, prayers, and resources are all ways we can show solidarity. As we enter this final week of our Lenten journey, let our giving of an hour's wage each week serve as one way we are "giving up poverty" through solidarity with our neighbors in the 75215 and 75426 zip codes.

A M E N





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TUESDAY, APRIL 11

Know Us

We need the church. We need the church in very real ways. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this great community needs you.

We need jobs. We've got to bring jobs back to this community. Church is not just for preachers, that's what I love about church. When you are talking about how churches can be a part of the community, you have to take a look at everyone there. Maybe someone has a friend who is connected to a grocery store chain. If we could get a grocery store here it would provide food to a community and lots of jobs, then we could begin to take real steps towards strengthening the community. Churches are networks for people and networks of people can affect change. The right person hears the story and the next day a glimmer of hope for an economically friendly food store could be more than just a glimmer. Did you know that the city has 3 million dollars right now that they would give someone to move a grocery store here? But it's not just about a job. We need better transportation. We need Dallas Area Rapid Transit to have better train schedules, more stops and more reliability. People need transportation to work. If I get a job, now I can go to a job in an affordable way and then I can provide. Being able to provide means that we control the destiny of our family. It changes the stature and attitude of a person. That

confidence then goes to their children. Jobs are more than just jobs-a job is a ripple effect that leads to children having a better outlook on learning and the future.

Let's talk about police officers. Chief Brown has said that they are overworked and we, in South Dallas, feel the real pull of this. We have a dog problem. We had a young lady, a veteran who had served this country with pride, killed by a dog. That shouldn't happen. We need animal control. We need people to educate animal owners on how to spay and neuter their animals. We can do better. South Dallas needs code enforcement. Many vacant lot owners aren't present here. We don't have anyone to enforce the rules with those owners. The residents work to keep their houses nice and their yards clean but next to every resident is a lot or home owned by someone who has never been here and doesn't care. Without city code enforcement help, it won't get better. We don't just want random police officers who have to be in 3 different communities a day. How do officers get to know a community? There is tension between civilians and officers because we don't know each other. If officers could be community police officers, they would know those who are here for who they are. We wouldn't be judging based on what someone looks like or where they are standing but on who belongs in this community and who is out of place.



I am Mark. Pray with me today: I pray for a renaissance. We have great ingredients in our community and it is time to make them better. Help us to preserve the integrity of our community as we build a strong place that is bright and diverse. Let it celebrate our brothers and sisters and the vibrant heritage of South Dallas.

No faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. -HEBREWS 11:1



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W E D N E S D A Y , A P R I L 1 2

I Live Here

I grew up in South Dallas. It's not that no one gets out and becomes successful. That's not part of the problem. The problem is that we get out, we find success and we stay away. We don't give this neighborhood the chance to benefit from our growth. Not me. I found success. I found education. I have a family. I live here in South Dallas. I show the kids that there is another way. That the drug dealers aren't really the ones to succeed and I plant my roots here so that others may find hope in their community as I have.

The Zip Code Connection has figured something out that is very important. None of us can eradicate poverty in one zip code alone. I work for Dallas Bethlehem Center and Boots on the Ground. I

connect families that are just around the corner each day with better resources, healthcare options, education options, and prayer, but I don't do it alone. I lean on the assistance of so many others who are in these streets with me. Together we will make a difference. We will turn this big ship towards the hope of God and it is only by the grace of God that we will find the strength to do so.

What can you do to bring transformation in my community? Come be part of my community. They serve as the glue that holds the Faith Coalition together. They help support organizations and the programs they offer like the Dallas Bethlehem Center's Breakfast and Books. Don't just paint my house. Come in, stay awhile and enjoy a cup of coffee.



I am Brandon. Today I pray for you: May God's call on your life lead you to ministry in your own community. May partnership and friendship be the start of a beautiful foundation in communities everywhere.

Let us not grow weary in doing what is right,
for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

So then, whenever we have an opportunity,
let us work for the good of all, and especially
for those of the family of faith. -GALATIANS 6:9-10

SUNDAY, APRIL 16

Risen, Indeed

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. – JOHN 20.17-22


Christ the Lord is risen today! Hallelujah! As we experience the joy of the Resurrection anew, let us be filled with a Spirit of courage, strength, and belief that all things are made new through the One who created, sustains, and redeems us. We are Resurrection People! And as such, we are called to live as people who truly believe all things are possible with God. We have journeyed together this Lenten season with our neighbors in the Clarksville/Red River County and South Dallas/Fair Park communities. We have listened to their stories of pain, as well as their stories of hope. We have heard their cries for help, and their encouragement for new possibilities. As Resurrection People, let us join them in the renewing of their neighborhoods – the transforming of their communities – so that together, we might join in the mission of Christ to transform the world!

PRAYER

Holy and Living God –
nothing, not even death,
can keep you from loving
your people; may we not
allow anything to stop us
from loving your people too.

AMEN



 Thank you for walking in solidarity with your neighbors in Clarksville/Red River County and South Dallas/Fair Park this Lenten season. Thank you for listening to their stories. Thank you for seeing them as your siblings in the family of God. And thank you for “giving up poverty” through setting aside an hour’s wage each week of this journey to support the innovative ministries of the Zip Code Connection.

ONE MISSION, FIVE PATHWAYS.

The Zip Code Connections exists to make significant progress toward eradicating poverty in two zip codes by 2025.

We believe poverty is best addressed by tackling its root causes in the areas of **community engagement, education, health & wellness, and economic development**, all through the lens of our **faith**.

Acting as a think tank for the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, we're developing open-source models and resources to effect change far beyond our two initial focus areas.



CONVENE

Perhaps the most powerful tool we have is each other. Zip Code Connection brings together neighbors and others around a common table to work for a common purpose.

LEARN TOGETHER

Shared knowledge empowers our communities to work toward a common good. Zip Code Connection invests in learning together with our neighbors and our partners.

LEVERAGE

Zip Code Connection helps our partners identify core strengths, strategies, and resources which can be leveraged for maximum impact.

“The faith coalition opened up an opportunity for us to get to know one another so that we can work together and make a big difference for this community.”

—Mark Murrell, South Dallas Fair Park

There are 150 churches of different creeds in South Dallas Fair Park, and the Zip Code Connection helped bring together these churches around a common table. Because of the combined efforts of the South Dallas Fair Park Faith Coalition, partner churches now leverage their efforts in multiple areas, including coordinated summer programming to ensure children in the neighborhood have access to safe, positive experiences.

“It is in those connections that we will slowly climb back into a community of love and engagement.”

—John McPeters, Red River County

In Red River County, the Community Alliance has brought together neighbors from all walks of life who are learning together and creating new ways of helping each other grow and prosper.



HOW WE GET THERE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



WHY IS THIS THE FOCUS?

Intentional collaboration and engagement of all neighbors will educate and equip them to have a greater impact in all areas of community transformation.

OUR INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

More than 50% of the residents vote in elections and participate in community associations.

HOW WE'RE GETTING THERE

- Comm. Alliance of Red River Co.
- "Boots on the Ground" surveying the neighborhood
- "Get out the vote" campaigns in South Dallas Fair Park

EDUCATION



WHY IS THIS THE FOCUS?

A holistic approach to education and training for families and community members will increase their capacity to benefit from all aspects of community transformation.

OUR INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The schools in the community are at or above the average state rating and 90% of all students are considered college or career-ready.

HOW WE'RE GETTING THERE

- Supporting church volunteer efforts
- Seeking grants to support the schools
- Connecting parents and community for school improvement

HEALTH & WELLNESS



WHY IS THIS THE FOCUS?

Healthy foods, increased physical activity, accessible quality health care, and education about health and nutrition will substantially improve health outcomes for the community.

OUR INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The community health index is at or above the state average.

HOW WE'RE GETTING THERE

- Urban Farms Coalition in SDFP
- Convening food pantries in RRC to explore deeper collaborations
- Seeking to deploy health resources closer to where they are needed
- Supporting access to better grocery stores and fresh food

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



WHY IS THIS THE FOCUS?

New and expanded economic opportunities and development will increase the earning capacity of the neighbors and sustain the community transformation for the future.

OUR INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Unemployment rate at or below state average, and 80% of residents employed are paid at least twice the minimum wage.

Community business sector highly diversified. Community economic wealth rise.

HOW WE'RE GETTING THERE

- Communities Unlimited project in Red River County
- The District (Fair Park District Entrepreneur Center) in SDFP

FAITH



WHY IS THIS THE FOCUS?

The faith community has huge resources of people, ideas, and power that can move mountains if we work together with our neighbors.

OUR INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

There is an increase in the number of churches and faith communities inside the neighborhood that are collaborating.

HOW WE'RE GETTING THERE

- South Dallas Fair Park Faith Coalition
- Connecting UMC church missions to these communities
- Tablespace, interfaith conversations among people interested in working together



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