

Vital, Vibrant, Viral

Bob Adams

What do Nehemiah, a one-hundred year old crumbling storefront, and a church with a passion for loving people where they are have in common?

Vital

Nehemiah: cup-bearer to the king. That's what his business card would have said. What it really meant was this Persian-born Jewish administrator had constant access to the king whose family had conquered Jerusalem over one hundred years before. When word reached him that Jewish expatriates had been struggling for years but had not been successful in rebuilding the city, Nehemiah was driven to his knees in prayer. This one vital act, played out over months of soul-searching, led to Nehemiah returning with the blessings of the king and rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

Vibrant

Several thousand years later, the story of Nehemiah and urban renewal by the people of God is again being played out in cities all around the world. Granger Community Church in Granger, Indiana, is just one such story. Located in a prosperous and growing suburb of South Bend Indiana, GCC was not content to sit in suburbia ignoring the plight of the city. Though located only a few miles from the church, the urban area called Monroe Circle was as different as could be: average family income of less than \$7,300; less than 25% of children graduating from high school; 70% of children in single family situations; 35% of all the city's homicides committed in this community.

Yet within that dark circle of despair, a spark glimmered. A non-profit food pantry for senior citizens run by senior citizens was about to close. GCC learned about the situation, and went before a skeptical city housing authority for permission to take over the food pantry. Reluctant and very skeptical permission was granted, with the admonition that one misstep and the church would be thrown out. Investing time, sweat, blood, and under- girded by prayer, 8 years later Monroe Circle Community Center (MC3) stands as a testimony to the vibrant place a community can be when it learns to believe in itself.

Viral

From a food pantry to children's activities to afterschool tutoring to GED classes to vocational training to teaching life skills...the relational programming of MC3 is reversing the trends of welfare dependency and hopelessness prevalent through the community. In addition, through grass-roots community building and home based

surveys, the following macro-categories are being targeted to measure transformational change in the Monroe Circle Community:

V-vocational training

A-arts community

L-leadership and spiritual development

U-unique health and wellness

E-education

Like a pebble thrown into a pond, the ripples of what is happening at MC3 are spreading. The Housing Authority, once skeptical and distrustful of the church's efforts, now says: "Do anything you want, anywhere you want, anytime you want, any way you want." Other properties in the community are now being transformed into inviting homes. The South Bend Silver Hawks minor league team, which plays in a stadium right behind MC3, has provided mentors and coaches for a Little League team from the area. On Friday April 24, the MC3 Bravehearts took the field for their first-ever game – and the good news continues to spread like a virus.

Is your church doing something vital, vibrant, and viral? Or are you on cruise control?

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