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## Neighbors United

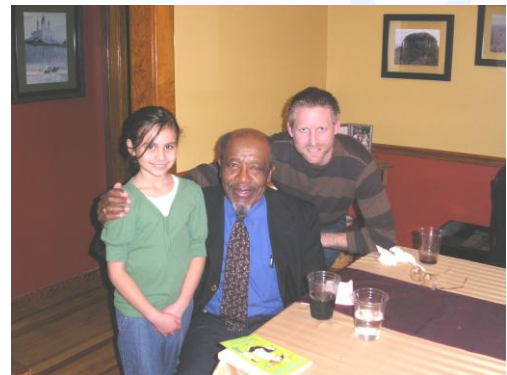
*“You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins.... Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.... [the people] replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work”. (Nehemiah 2:17-18)*

Dearest Friends and Family,

Hope this letter finds you and your loved-ones well. In these turbulent times in which we live, the reminder of our need for each other certainly becomes magnified. As we write this letter, we too are deeply reminded of this truth in our relationship with you.

This January marked the one-year anniversary of our neighbor-driven and neighborhood-based community development and organizing initiative! As you may recall from a previous update, the neighborhood where we’re currently active in this work is known as Park Avenue, one of Omaha’s most historic and, at the same time, most under-resourced and at-risk areas.

Within Park Avenue, nearly one out of every four neighbors lives below the poverty threshold<sup>1</sup>, however local research groups estimate that number may have significantly increased in recent years<sup>2</sup>. Only one in ten residents owns their home and household incomes are strikingly low<sup>3</sup>. This lack of equity and earning power leaves few safeguards between a stable home for a family, and the prospect of homelessness.



**ADINA & CHRISTIAN W/ JOHN PERKINS,  
FOUNDER OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT ASSOC.  
(FROM WHICH WE BASE MUCH OF OUR  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES)**

Recognizing the dynamic value and importance of the contribution of people of faith in the local context, MCD initiated and continues to organize and facilitate a very successful faith-leader collaboration in Park Avenue area known as Neighbors United (NU). Already within the short timeframe of its existence, NU has developed and launched a weekly community meal initiative where neighbors enjoy a warm, nutritional meal while also building relationships and developing community and social capital. Some of this ministry’s early highlights include...

- 150+ volunteers making the meal possible
- 140+ Park Avenue neighbors participating each week

<sup>1</sup> 2000 U.S. Census Bureau Report

<sup>2</sup> Destination Midtown Park Avenue Redevelopment Study

<sup>3</sup> 2000 U.S. Census Bureau Report

- 100's of winter clothing items have been collected and distributed
- 13 denominationally-diverse churches and para-churches represent the leadership of NU
- 12 local and suburban churches and para-churches are committed to providing meals on a rotating basis
- 2 formerly homeless neighbors are now in stable housing.

NU continues to grow in locally unprecedented proportions—both in involvement and accomplishment!

**“I’ve been working for three years to connect pastors in community over the needs of the neighborhood; it’s not until now that that dream and prayer is coming true.”**  
 – Pastor Kip Mickelson, First Baptist Church

Recently NU has been considering what will be its next steps in building upon the neighborhood assets in Park Avenue. These ideas include the initiation of various neighborhood-based services such as affordable childcare, community gardens and the development of a community center. In our dreaming together of what might become, we seem to be in unanimous agreement in what should remain: 1) being people whose response is rooted in faith and 2) being committed to our relationships with each other and with our neighbors.

As we neared the closing minutes during one of our recent NU meetings, Pastor Judith Rainforth of First Lutheran Church captured this commitment to relationship perfectly by saying, “Many people have been burned-out on charity because it has been without relationship. However, when we do something in relationship we also receive – it becomes a two-way street.” We have definitely received beyond description in our two-way relationship with our partners in NU – being witness to God’s transformational power and being welcomed in love and friendship by those who are created in His image.

Kingdom come,

Christian & Sonya Gray

1. For the continued development and success of community development and organizing efforts in Park Avenue (Neighbors United).
2. For not only the transformation of the neighborhood in Park Avenue but for the transformation of its neighbors as well (e.g. Support Works in Park Ave).
3. For our support needs: we are currently receiving \$200+/mo below our salary needs.

PLEASE PRAY...