



NEW DIRECTION Mustard Seed

December 2018

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Dear Friends,

On the evening of November 1 we were honored to host a wonderful dinner and celebration of the work of the Mustard Seed Project. It was a beautiful collaborative effort of many: a committee of dedicated women who met and planned for months leading up to the event; individuals, churches, and professionals who sponsored tables, financially covering the cost of the evening; Over 70 wonderful donated items for the silent auction; a printing company covering printing costs; a couple putting together a fluent video of some of the stories; another couple providing beautiful music; and over 200 guests who drove through an evening of stormy, rainy weather to arrive at the Crest Center. It was an evening of thanks and celebration of the Lord's rescue and restoration of the single parent families with whom we have been walking. We were overwhelmed to find the collective contributions tally to be \$36,000. If you are interested in viewing the Mustard Seed Video presented that evening, the link is: <https://youtu.be/Nf7HoBtB-Wg>. Many of you who receive this newsletter have been faithful partners in the work of New Direction and Mustard Seed over the years. A large number of you were unable to attend that evening. We want you to know how very thankful we are for you walking with us as we walk with these parents and children.

At the end of the evening the floor was opened for questions, one of which was "are you involved in affordable housing for families?" Sometimes after the fact you wish you had time to prepare proper answers to such questions. We mentioned we would, eventually, like to have a 4 unit apartment building as a first step for some of the families. We also mentioned it would be wonderful for the Mustard Seed to be able to purchase homes whereby the families would pay monthly rent and eventually, when stable and able, take over a mortgage. There are a number of important pieces that we left out that evening which we would like to expound upon. And the answer is "yes" we have in the past and continue, at present, seek and establish affordable housing for these families.

Over these years of working with families who fall into the category of living below the poverty level we have learned a lot about the dilemma many find themselves in upon once crossing the threshold into government assistance. It is important to note that all of the parents with whom we work are hardworking individuals; most in the service industry. It is also important to understand that the majority fled living situations that were abusive. For many there were multiple times of leaving and returning due to the reality of how very difficult it is to make it financially. In most cases these women were told throughout the marriage “you would never be able to make it without me.” Statistics show that oftentimes it takes up to seven times before a woman will finally leave for good; usually this resolve occurs when the suffering of the children is apparent.



“Affordable housing” has become such a ubiquitous term here in Western North Carolina. What does affordable housing really mean? It is so often tossed around here in Asheville which is a city that has become saturated with tourism as well as a flood of individuals who desire to put down roots. Apartments are built with the promise of 10% of units being offered for “affordable housing”. All of this sounds so wonderful.....until you are in the thick of reality with families such as those we are called to walk with. In essence it sounds wonderful.....but is nebulous for these hard working, starting from scratch protective parents.

A google search of affordable housing: “refers to housing units that are affordable by that section of society whose income is below the median household income. As a result it becomes the increased responsibility of the government to cater to the rising demand for affordable housing.” Affordable housing by HUD standards here in Asheville says that a one bedroom apartment should cost \$723 a month with all utilities included. The majority of the parents involved in the Mustard Seed Project make about \$16,000 a year. These households have between 1 and 3 children. Poverty alone creates great stress. Women who find themselves suddenly solely responsible for finding and maintaining housing for themselves and their children are vulnerable and desperate.

One of the mothers (before meeting us) had received help from a local domestic crisis center and was placed, along with her two little boys, in government housing. She had no idea it would be one of the more dangerous housing projects in Asheville. As she was moving in a man approached her to show her a gun. She quickly gathered her boys and went in and locked the door and spent the night awake and on guard. She decided if it meant living out of her car with the boys she would do so. The next morning she left never to return. Fortunately a co-worker helped facilitate her getting into a low rent, safe housing apartment complex. Truly the hand of the Lord parted the waters for this mother.

When one steps into government assistance it becomes a loop to which there appears to be no end. Once in how does one get out? We often hear stories such as “I could choose to not work and get government assistance but what kind of future would that be for me and my children?” One young woman told us that she is essentially the only member of several generations of her family who decided to get training and work. She was mocked by family members “why would you want to go out and work so hard?” Her reply “because I want to live a life of purpose and meaning.” One woman with whom we worked for a short period of time, had been living in government housing and expressed a desire to get out. We initially helped with a couple of emergency situations, tentatively watching to see how serious she was about doing the work of getting out. You see not everyone is willing to do the work. We tell the parents that God will do His part 100%, we will do our part, they must do their part to get free. When there is such collaborative effort there is 100% success rate. This is not a figure of conjecture. It is true. We

began to notice this woman had a pattern of quitting jobs; her excuse being of great variety.....but the bottom line was whenever she worked she had to pay higher rent.....when she didn't work she paid \$40 a month with all utilities paid. Once we understood the pattern we had to have a difficult conversation with her saying we would not be able to continue forward with her. Some people are not motivated to walk forward. They are trapped in the comfort of the loop.

But the parents with whom we work are among those who fall into the category "I will do whatever it takes to break my family free". We know and they know, the Lord has connected us to walk together. Galatians 6:2 says "carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." John MacArthur's commentary on this verse: "when the load weights us down and the troubles become too much for one person to bear, pie-in-the-sky sentiments can sound very hollow. That is precisely why the church is so important. It is our duty, as believers, to help bear one another's burdens. When someone staggers we help steady the load. If he is straining, we help bear the burden. And if he stumbles, we lift him up. Helping fellow believers carry the weight of their worldly troubles is one of the chief practical duties that ought to consume every Christian. We live in crowded and over-populated neighborhoods, interact with one another through social media, yet most individuals are more isolated than ever. The apostle Paul clearly has in mind spiritual, emotional and temperamental encumbrances – not physical freight only. The burdens we need to help carry for one another include guilt, worry, sorry, anxiety and all other similar loads." (Ligonier Ministries: Bearing One Another's Burdens by John MacArthur). I have a set of picture cards I use with clients asking them to pick out cards that best describe their situation. Inevitably the single parents will initially pick out this

card which pretty much tells the story of them carrying a burden far too great for any human being to carry alone. In my mind I have a picture which is representative of the Mustard Seed Project depicting hundreds (that being donors) walking alongside us as we walk with the parents.....each of us carrying a parcel of that huge load.

What do we see as the solution to affordable housing? That each of us would respond according to what is written in Galatians 6 accordingly. I would like to share a perfect example of this in action. Two years ago we had an insert in our newsletter which expressed the need for a three bedroom home for a mother and her son and daughter who had been living in a two bedroom gov't subsidized apartment. Mother and daughter were sharing a bedroom and teenage son the other. This family had come out of huge chaos and were needing to have space enough to begin a life of structure and order. We said we would be able to pay \$550 a month for rent. A donor read the plea, called and said she felt the Lord wanted this family to move into a home she owned. Normally she would have received nearly twice the amount. But she was led to offer the home for the amount we were able to pay. The family moved in, we continued to supplement the payment until the mother was able to carry it on her own. Two years later the family is living at and continues to love that home. Their time line was that of several evictions years prior when living in a negligent and abusive situation. History is not and, we believe, will not repeat itself in this family's life. They have experienced someone they had never met, moved by the Lord to carry a parcel of this family's burden. This, we believe, is the answer to the housing issue for these who are among us. If each of us would seek the direction of the Lord in such matters we may be surprised at how extraordinary the ripple effect would be. It is



Help to carry one another's burdens.

important to us that these families live in homes that are safe and pleasant. A home that we, ourselves, could live in; for isn't this that aspect of "loving your neighbor as yourself?"

This is the work of Joy Hof whom I approached about painting what psalm 18 might look like regarding the rescue and restoration of these women. What a contrast it is to the heavy laden figure describing the plight and the weight of these parents as we stepped into walking with them. You are one who is walking with them as well. We are greatly appreciative.

Thankful For Your Partnership
All of Us at the Mustard Seed Project

www.newdirectionmustardseed.com



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