I am writing first to thank you for your support and prayers for Oxford Circle Mennonite Church and the Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association and to welcome you to our newsletter and mailing list. We look forward to being able to communicate with you regularly through this avenue.

This has been an exciting year for us. We successfully incorporated our nonprofit, Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association (OCCCDA) in 2006. During the past several months, we have also formalized the board and developed working subcommittees to begin the work of implementing our vision. As a small congregation, this is a huge undertaking, however, we are excited at the possibilities since we continue to see positive opportunities for our community to access a widening network of resources and ministries.

Programmatically, we hosted a summer education program and our annual community festival this past year. We also partnered with Mennonite Disaster Service and provided volunteers to serve in Katrina clean-up in Louisiana. Currently we are planning to start a mentoring program this summer with our summer education program. We recognize the need to use the resources we have while we continue to develop further opportunities. Additionally, we are working to develop funding for both program implementation and space needs both for our growing congregation and our Community Center.

~Anita Lyndaker-Studer, Editor

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was asked early in the civil rights struggle what was the end goal of the emerging movement. The end goal articulated by Rev. King was clear: “the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community.” Rev. King recognized more than most Christians even today that reconciliation and redemption are at the heart of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Our desire at Oxford Circle Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, where I have been pastor for eight years, and most recently, assumed the role of Board President of the Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association, is to reflect “the beloved community.” We are adhering to God’s call to be his reconciled people in our community—living out reconciliation with God and with each other by demonstrating the redeeming power of reconciliation in our community. Our desire is to be a place where the marks of a beloved community are evident.

For the past five years, we have hosted a Community Festival where games, community resources, and the message of hope are being publicly shared. We have also partnered with the local public housing to provide a 2 month children’s Summer Educational Camp. Our church has also served as a host for Narcotics Anonymous, participated in the local soup kitchen, and partnered to provide a neighborhood Farmer’s Market. Yet we have only begun and you will see in this and future newsletters why we are excited about what God is doing in us, amongst us and in our beloved community.

~Pastor Leonard Dow
When school is out for the summer, kids have a lot of free time that is not always used in constructive ways. We wanted to take advantage of that time by creating a positive place where they could be educationally enriched and allowed to express their creativity. Additionally, we wanted to infuse our Christian faith into all aspects of the program so that they could learn about Jesus and be exposed to good Christian role models. The Summer Education Program also fits into the broader framework of our church’s community outreach and development as an initial part of our 3-year plan, in which we engage the kids of the community and through them begin to get to know their families.

The Summer Education Program ran 3 days a week for 6 weeks, from July 11th to August 17th. By the end of the program we had 29 kids registered and on any given day we would have 15-20 kids. Our theme was “God’s love is for everyone.” We were blessed to have 3 teachers who came and led each of those days with reading, art, and music programming.

Directing this program was challenging but also extremely rewarding but I can say without hesitation that it was all worth it. It was so rewarding to get to know each of the kids and share a part of their lives. They brought such energy and enthusiasm to everything they did, and being with them made my spirits lift! Even though they came from low-income families, they still had high hopes and dreams. Yet they had more to deal with than most, and some things they told me were disturbing. It was hard leaving because I hate to be a temporary part of kids’ lives – they need people who are permanent. Yet I believe that we did make a difference. We planted seeds and we must trust that God will nurture them and help them grow. It has been encouraging that several of the kids have come to church this fall!

God taught me this summer that He is faithful, in the little things and in the big ones. I have always had a nagging doubt in the back of my mind as to whether prayer really makes a difference. But when the funding for our field trips disappeared, the only thing we could do was pray. And incredibly, within days we had the money that we needed! God is truly awesome! It is He who made this program possible, and who will continue to work in the lives of these kids.

~ Amanda Arbour  
Director, Summer Education Program

One important way we are seeking to minister to youth and children at OCCCDA is through developing mentoring relationships. Through one-on-one mentoring, we hope to:

- Assist children and youth in the Oxford Circle/Summerdale area in building life skills.
- Aid them in assignments and cultivate constructive attitudes toward academic work.
- Encourage them in informed, positive decision making.
- Support them in creative conflict resolution.
- Nurture their spiritual formation in relation to God and others.

Our hope is to continue the relationships formed during the Summer Education Program between OCMC and participating children and families through one-on-one mentoring relationships.

Mentors who want to be involved will be expected to comply with all OCCCDA requirements, including submitting all application materials, completing a personal interview, attending a training session in July, and committing to one hour a week with the mentee for at least one year and to prayer for the mentee, in the hope of opportunities for spiritual and personal formation.

If God has done something in your life through the positive influence of another person, this is your opportunity to be that person to a child in our church’s community. Don’t miss this chance to grow as a person and to make a difference!

Peter Senesig, Pastoral Intern

Festival participant gets a personalized face painting.

Amanda working with two summer education students on their art project.

God is truly awesome! It is He who made this program possible, and who will continue to work in the lives of these kids.
PLANS FOR THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL

It has been amazing to watch God bless this effort over the past five years. We especially want to thank the Blooming Glen Damascus Road Team for their volunteering to coordinate the children’s games for the past two years (one of the hardest jobs at the festival)! Additionally we want to thank Cardone Industries and Franconia Conference who have faithfully donated every year since the festival began.

There are many other volunteers and donors who have blessed us and our community over the years. To name just a few: the Mustard Seed Foundation; Youth Partners Net; the Frankford Ministry; and Hatfield Meats. Please know that you are appreciated!

This year’s festival is scheduled for September 8, 2007. If you or your church are interested in volunteering or donating this year, call us at (215) 288-5330.

UPDATES ON OUR PROPERTY SEARCH

Through God’s faithfulness, our congregation has:

- Doubled Attendance over the last 5 yrs
- 100 persons join us in worship each Sunday in 1,100 sq. ft. sanctuary (Total property=3300 sq ft)

We have a clear vision to remain in the immediate Oxford Circle neighborhood which limits the commercial properties appropriate for the needs of both OCMC and OCCCDA. We estimate a minimum space need of 10,000 sq. ft. Current rent runs about $16-20/sq. ft. which equals an annual budget need of $160-200,000/yr which is not currently feasible for us. After reviewing multiple scenarios, it seems clear that purchasing property even while initially requiring more funds, allows us to create equity while holding a positive stake in the community.

PROPOSED PROPERTY

- 40,000 sq ft property on same intersection as church.
- Currently has committed rental income for 25,000 sq ft.
- Once 20% down-payment and fit-out costs raised, rental income will cover monthly payments on 15 year mortgage.
- Once principal paid off, rental income could help subsidize future ministries of OCMC/OCCCDA!

Total Project Cost: $4 Million
- Asking Price: $3.5 Million
- Projected Fit-Out: $500,000

Available to date: $350,000
- OCMC: $25,000
- Philadelphia Urban Ministry Partnership: $25,000
- Donor group: $50,000
- Current OCMC property: $250,000

Still Needed: $850,000

Richard Rohrer
Property Chair

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

We invite you to partner with us by:

- Committing to prayer as we step into new and exciting ventures through the work of the OCCCDA
- Volunteering for the summer programming and/or festival
- Providing match funds for the Mustard Seed Foundation for summer programs and the festival
- Committing to an annual/monthly investment in OCCCDA
- Committing to match the $50,000 raised by our congregation and Philadelphia Urban Ministry Partnership for our property fund (or any amount you feel called to contribute)
- Partnering to provide low or no interest loans anywhere up to $2,900,000
- Recruiting Kingdom-Minded Investors with a desire to purchase property and sell back it back after several years.

Through God’s faithfulness, our congregation has doubled in attendance over last 5 yrs.

Team of OCMC volunteers who worked with Mennonite Disaster Service in Dulac, Louisiana to assist with hurricane clean up.
To extend healing and hope in the Oxford Circle community believing that God’s purpose of reconciling all people to Jesus leads us to minister on spiritual, physical, social & economic levels.