

NOTES FROM THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

APRIL—JUNE 2008

WELCOME TO OCCDA

Hello and welcome from a steamy Philadelphia!

First, I need to thank you for your prayers. What has stood out over the past months, is that God is working beyond my capabilities. I can only attribute that to your prayers! I have been reminded time and again that while God calls me to be faithful, it is not my effort that is making this possible.

One of the highlights these past months has been the development of a Community Peace Garden in partnership with the Houseman Recreation Center.

The project has allowed us to develop positive relationships with youth and staff through the after school program. In addition, I can say I have worked harder physically than I have in years (lots of digging!) :)

Another exciting development has been the progress made in the purchase of a building as we continue to burst out the seams of our current facilities. Thanks to partnerships developed through Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, we have seen this



Some of our Peace Garden Participants.

become a concrete possibility. In addition, Mennonite Central Committee, East Coast, has committed to moving with us into the building. It is truly a miracle to see these partnerships come together in ways that can only be attributed to God working! ~Anita Lyndaker-Studer, Executive Director

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **Summer Camp: Oxford Village, 7/8–8/15/08, 1–4:30pm (Tuesday–Fridays)**
- **Jared Hess Memorial Blood Drive: OCMC, 8/9/08, 9-2pm**
- **Camp Closing Event: OCMC, 8/15/08, 6:00pm**
- **Community Festival: Houseman Recreation Center 9/13/08, 12-4pm**
- **Upcoming Board meetings: 6/22/08, 7/27/08, 8/24/08, and 9/28/08**

A WORD FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Excerpt from article in Mennonite Mission Network on “Sharing Christ through challenges”:

We cannot do this at the corner of Howell and Langdon on our own. We have to have partners outside our community that feel the importance of equipping a community, not just feeding them one hot meal or doing a one-time Bible school.

We now have a 501c3 positioning us to be intentional in ministering in our community from a Christ-centric perspective in the areas of youth programs, parenting and family skills, entrepreneurial training, and conflict mediation. That’s how relationships have grown and families now come to church – because we’re equipping people

holistically, not just hosting a one-time event or trying to evangelize.

Mennonites have 500 years of history looking at how Jesus interprets modern events with our historical values of peace, nonviolence, reconciliation and restoration. Most of us in an urban context deal with those issues on a daily basis. It’s one thing to talk about peace in Iraq. It’s another thing to talk about peace and hope on the corner of Howell and Langdon with drug dealers and youth packing guns daily. These folks are our neighbors, possibly the future of our congregation.

We have many challenges and many hopes, though we still have limited resources. No one from mission agencies will come to say, “How can we help Mom and

Dad?” People will come to paint a building or minister to children but we need professional help in the areas of financial planning (purchase of a larger facilities, household budgeting) and family systems.

Still, we are healthy. Jesus after his resurrection appeared to his disciples with all his scars from the cross, yet no one would call him unhealthy for he overcame death! We at OCMC are healthy, though we have plenty of scars. When people look at us, they hesitate, like being on the freeway and seeing an accident – you cannot stop looking at it.

I am so glad that God created an accident in this place.

~Pastor Leonard Dow

HOUSEMAN PEACE GARDEN, WAR & PEACE

I have not read War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy but I imagine that its 1408 pages explain the contrast between the two states of existence. War, a state of conflict can exist simultaneously with peace, a state of harmony. I experienced both while working on the Houseman Peace Garden project with Anita.

We began in mid April with a visit to recreation center's after school program. Initially all of the students seemed enthusiastic about the prospect of creating a garden. Throughout April and May we worked diligently to transform the dim entrance area of Houseman Recreation Center into an eye-catching green space. The laborious work included clearing the whole area of grass and weeds, applying a top layer of soil, and removing ten to fifteen stubborn tree stumps and their thick roots. The enjoyable tasks like planting seeds, painting the sign and peace pole, and slurp-

ing cool, sweet water ice after gardening made the difficult tasks rewarding.

This project was uniquely different than other gardening projects that I have experienced. The term "peace garden" holds great significance. Creating a peace garden involved more than a group of people planting and pruning. Thoughts of various people of different ethnicities, ages, and life experiences united on one accord to create the beautiful space represented peace to me. The vandals who ruined the hand-made mosaic stepping stones reminded me of the ugly destruction of war. Though I was reminded of war and peace creating the garden, the dedication on June 6th was a peaceful event.

All who attended the Safe Night and Garden Dedication looked content and tranquil. The quaint crowd enjoyed refreshments, chatting, and a peace themed art display before the program began Friday evening. House-

man Recreation Center Director Connie Summerow began the dedication by welcoming the attendees. The program ended with a prayer of dedication by Pastor Leonard Dow of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church and a ribbon cutting by all of the children who participated in creating the Houseman Peace Garden—Before & After garden. With the dedication ceremony complete the garden will require regular upkeep. I encourage all who committed to maintaining the established peace and beauty of the garden to volunteer their time. ~ Tonia Voss, Project Coordinator



Houseman Peace Garden—Before & After

“Peace means that the civilians and I feel safe.” ~ Chris

PEACE POETRY—AFTER SCHOOL

People love family
E-veryone should stop the violence
A-ll people should stop the drugs
C-are for your family
E-ach person should love the world.

~ Duron Bryant, 3rd grade

What peace means to me is people loving each other. Also peace means no intoxication or drugs or alcohol in our community and streets. Peace means that the civilians and I feel safe. Personally I think that drugs are a disgrace and people are getting killed for plants that are wanted to be smoked. Peace is when cops aren't knocking on my window to find the location of Crack and halfway houses.

That's what Peace means to me!

People loving
E-veryone cares
A-rts of the world
C-aring for the community
E-veryone loves

~Christen Bryant, 4th grade



Pastor Leonard and Connie Summerow, Houseman Recreation Director at Peace Garden Dedication and Safe Night Event.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING THE PROPERTY AT 5600 LANGDON STREET

How Close are We to Making an Offer? With help from friends with business, accounting, and legal expertise from Franconia Mennonite conference, we have submitted a formal sales agreement to the owner of the property at 5600 Langdon for a purchase price agreed to by their board of \$3.5 million.

Who Would Own the Building? The proposed plan is for the Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association to be the owner. This gives the church protection from direct liability regarding legal issues, tenant issues, etc. It also allows the church to invest its energies into the mission of the church, instead of energies being consumed in the property.

Where Would the Money Come From to Pay for the Building? At present, there are leases or commitments from tenants to fill 75% of the building. The income from these leases could support a mortgage payment on a \$3 million loan.

The church would sell its present building (estimated value \$300,000) and contribute the \$25,000 that it has raised to date toward the down-payment.

The church and the OCCEDA would in partnership aggressively fundraise over the next 6 months to secure at least an additional \$200,000 toward the down payment, and approximately \$500,000 (in cash or donated services) for fit-out of the church and OCCEDA's space in the new building.

What Happens Next? When our offer is accepted, we will place a deposit on the property (refundable if for any reason we don't proceed to settlement). We will then enter into an approximately 6 month window for feasibility studies, fundraising and further discernment. This will include a formal congregational affirmation process to approve selling our building, investing the proceeds in the project and formalizing a lease structure for the church space. Please pray for God's direction and provision as we continue to walk forward.
~ *Tim Leaman, Church Council Chair*



The building we are pursuing for purchase. It is directly across the street from our current facility.

“Pray for peace in our city. Make us part of the peace, Lord. Keep our neighborhoods safe.”

SUMMER CAMP - MEET CELMALI JAIME, SUMMER SERVICE INTERN

Peace. “It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.”

Believe me, growing up in the South Bronx was all about noise, trouble, and hard work. I am sure the same holds true for kids growing up in Philly today. But there is hope when we realize that peace is not determined by the state of our environment. Peace is a state of mind; it is an inner state of being. So whether one is in the midst of gunfire, a domestic dispute, or the chaotic bustle of the city, peace is always there. Anyone can tap into it, no matter where or in what situation they may find themselves in.

And so, this is one of the reasons why the Summer Education Program exists; to help children access their inner resources of peace. Our theme this year is “Peace is what I do, Peace is who I am.” In a sense, we are redefining peace. No longer is it an external entity. Peace is not leaving gun-infested Philadelphia for the quiet country; neither is it something that emerges with the arrival of cops. We at the Summer Education Program want children to internalize peace as a state of being and empower each child to be an active peacemaker. Not only is it the goal we strive for in our community and our home, but it is also who we are.

Our journey begins July 8th, and ends in August. Plans are

underway for community service projects, art classes, field trips, and of course, peace education sessions. My prayer is that despite the gun violence and fear in Philadelphia, joy, peace, and the ability to change will emerge in our children. I ask that your prayer and our city's prayer will be one of peace too.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.” Matthew 5:9

-*Celmali Jaime is the Summer Education Director this year. She is an Urban Studies graduate student at Eastern University, studying the Transformative Arts.*



Dreams of Peace—after school participants.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers:

President, Leonard Dow

Treasurer, Ed Dobeck

Secretary, Jennifer Leaman

Members:

Karen Jantzi

Peter Sensenig

Ron Sider

Krista Yoder

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Red Cross Blood Drive In Memory of Jared Hess

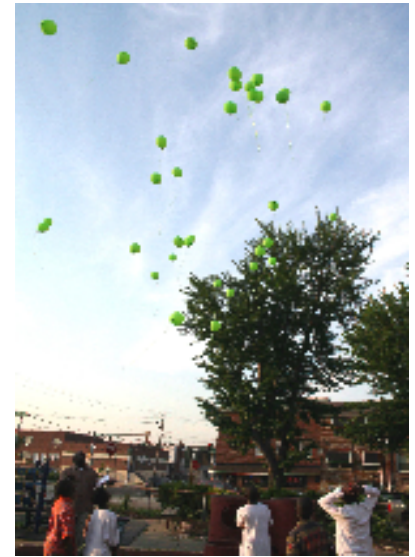
Saturday, August 9, 2008

9 AM – 3 PM

Oxford Circle Mennonite

For your convenience appointments
can be made by signing up online:

[http://www.membersforlife.org/
pennj/schedule/login.php?
sponsorcode=11752](http://www.membersforlife.org/pennj/schedule/login.php?sponsorcode=11752)



Balloon release in memory of victims of violence.

NOTES FROM THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

OXFORD CIRCLE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

For more information, please use the contact information below:

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**To extend
healing and hope in
the Oxford Circle
community,
believing that God's
purpose of reconcil-
ing all people
to Jesus leads us to
minister on
spiritual, physical,
social & economic
levels.**

Check our new website:

[www.occcda.org!](http://www.occcda.org)