

# Our Dream is Becoming a Reality

by the Dream Team

When the Dream Team met in August, they authorized the initiation of several new projects. Two months ago, we indicated that our first project was going to be a Transitional House for the YWCA. Since this will be the first Transitional House that the Y will own, it is taking them time to work out all of the details. Up to this time, they have leased all of their houses, but owning a house will allow them to provide housing services more cost effectively.

This month Habitat for Humanity will begin construction of a new house in the Kalamazoo Eastside Neighborhood at 1612 Charles Street. The majority of the funding for this house is being provided by First UMC and the City of Kalamazoo through the Foundation for Excellence.

In our discussion with the city over the past year, we have learned that all of us are working to improve affordable housing. Both First UMC and the city are interested in working with the same non-profits and are interested in working in the same neighborhoods. With all of these common goals, we have decided to work to coordinate our efforts.

For the house on Charles Street, Habitat for Humanity anticipates that it will take approximately one year to complete the house. During this time, we will have many opportunities to work on this specific house and other projects with Habitat.

During our year of studying housing in Kalamazoo, one of the things that we learned is that it is significantly more cost effective to assist individuals to remain in their homes rather than provide assistance after they have lost their home. As a result, we will also be partnering with Habitat for Humanity in assisting home owners to make necessary home repairs. We learned that while this is one of the more effective ways to address housing, it is also one of the most underfunded areas.

To help individual homeowners remain in their existing houses, we will provide Habitat \$25,000 per year for the next three years to facilitate these home repairs. Habitat will receive requests from individual home owners, evaluate the actual needs, develop a cost estimate, and decide as an organization if it is a

worthwhile project. If yes, they will forward it to First UMC for review and consideration. We believe that we will be able to assist many families per year to remain in their existing homes.

The team also approved working with Building Block on multiple projects in the Northside and Eastside Neighborhoods. "Building Blocks of Kalamazoo organizes residents, one block at a time, to enhance the quality of neighborhood life. Building Blocks brings neighbors together in neighborhoods that face unique challenges associated with poverty and chronic disinvestment." (www.bbkazoo.org/who-we-are) We will be providing support for four existing block action groups and the establishment of new block action groups in both neighborhoods.

Finally, another goal of the Dream was to provide opportunities for the congregation to learn more about our partner agencies and the work they are doing. We will also learn of other volunteer opportunities where First UMC members can continue to build relationships with our neighbors.

On the Dream Fund pledge card, there was an area where individuals could indicate an interest in either volunteering and or praying for our work with our partners. If you would like to join other congregational members who are interested in working with or praying for our partners, please send a note to [dreamfund@fumc.org](mailto:dreamfund@fumc.org) to be placed on the appropriate list.

Your ongoing financial and prayer support are helping the Dream to become a reality!

