

A little Good Works history....

(and ... a little philosophy too)

I am Jewish. I grew up in the east side suburbs of Cleveland Ohio, and my family was involved with the synagogue until I was 15 years old. I became a Christian (my preferred term is Follower of Jesus) when I was 16 in Centerville, Ohio through the power of the Holy Spirit, the outreach of my high school teacher and the friendship of fellow students involved in the local Baptist Church (which was experiencing revival through what is now called the Charismatic renewal). The year was 1975. I completed high school in 1976. This was the first true miracle God did in my life. I had been a drug addict and drug dealer from the age of 12 to the age of 16.

I moved to Athens, Ohio in 1976 to attend Ohio University. I had a sense that God was calling me to some form of ministry/mission but I did not have the understanding or language to explain this to others or myself. I immediately became involved in a UMC sponsored Campus group called Friday Night Fellowship and remained involved until 1987 serving in various roles, finishing my season in campus ministry working primarily with international students. For 7 of those years, I provided formal leadership to this group called River of Life Ministries.

In January 1981, I started what we would later call Good Works, Inc. Soon after I received the gift of naivety, I purchased and then remodeled the basement of my home and began to welcome what we would later call the homeless into my home. When we began, we did not have the language to understand nor describe what we were doing. I discovered that the leading of the Holy Spirit comes first and that language comes later. Truthfully, I had no idea what I was doing. But I did know a little about the voice of God and obedience. God used my "not-knowing" to get me to do something I would have never done if I known what I was doing. Today I call this faith. I was married in September 1981 and Darlene and I ran this "shelter" out of our basement for almost 4 years, welcoming men, women and children from rural Appalachia and learning about what we now call the ministry of hospitality. During those early years, we formed a board and began to raise funds and work with volunteers. Looking back, I know that our primary identity was learners. By grace, God gave us a teachable spirit. Darlene worked part time with the Athens Senior Center and I worked part time in Campus Ministry with Central UMC in Athens. The 4th year we were able to raise about \$300.00 a month. God supplied our needs and I can say with gratitude that the JOY of the LORD was our strength! In the background was this on-going, living, and every present development of a philosophy of ministry -- a very formative theology -- that we now call Vision of HOPE. It is available on our website under Christian Worldview.

Good Works moved from our home to a house the organization purchased on the west side of Athens at the end of 1984. We operated our shelter at that location initially with house managers and eventually with overnight staff. I continued part time until 1986 working both with the poor and with students doing campus ministry. In 1987 we hired our first fulltime staff (Robert Carter for whom we named The Carter Cabin) and by 1989, we hired our second full time staff. The ministry “cooked” inside this small shelter until the early 1990s when we began to expand into a broader outreach to widows and children struggling with poverty.

Today, Good Works has 10 to 15 different ministry initiatives all tied together with a common philosophy of ministry in the context of rural (southeast) Ohio.

Contextualization is very important to us. We moved from a ministry “to” the poor to a ministry “with” the poor in the early 1990s. This was monumental and opened the door for us to better understand reciprocity as a core value. As the LORD laid a foundation of scripture, one primary passage, Luke 4:14-30, became very significant and we became aware of several questions we must *continue* to ask as we persevere over many years (1) WHO are the poor, and what are the particulars they struggle with in our context? (2) What is the gospel and (3) HOW do we bring it? In my view, every Christian community must learn ways to live out both the proclamation and the demonstration of the gospel.

Another scripture that became important to us is from Job 29. In short, we embraced the vision to “*make the widow’s heart sing*”, “*take up the case of the stranger*” and “*be a father to the needy*”. We have been attempting to live into these values for more than 25 years.

Along the way, God has impressed upon us many different biblical passages that are now the foundations we are building upon. These include James 1:26-27 (caring for widows and the Fatherless in their time of distress), Exodus 33 (developing a growing desperation for the presence of God), Psalm 127 (knowing this is God’s work that we have been invited into it) and John 4 (the Father seeks worshippers and we seek to be the people God seeks). Indeed, many years ago, we came to understand that God has given our ministry a primary paradigm of worship. We also cherish, embrace and seek to practice Jesus prayer for the unity of the body in John 17. Our desire is that we may continue to live into these kingdom values.

Today we remain focused on *what it means to BE the body of Christ* in the world, for the world, for the glory of God. We are learning how to function as Christ’s body. We *are* a Christian community composed of paid staff, interns, volunteers and short-term participants. We facilitate four different ‘entry points’ into our community each week for others to join us as we seek the LORD through an intentional time of prayer, worship through song, scripture and community building.

In addition to providing the only home for people without homes in 8 southeast Ohio counties and several ongoing initiatives to intentionally build relationships

with adults and children struggling with poverty and vulnerability, we operate a small business, offer a solitude retreat cabin, host around 40 short-term mission teams each year (we call them Work Retreats) and sustain several different academic and residential internships. We facilitate opportunities for about 1,100 different volunteers to serve with us each year through 30+ volunteer opportunities. Half of our ministry is to “do it”. The other half is to create opportunities for 3 groups of people to “do it” with us: (1) The body of Christ for whom the outcome is discipleship (2) Not-yet Christians for whom the outcome is witness (3) People who live in the land of grey. By this I mean to say that we can’t determine where everyone is coming from until we get to know them. Therefore, we employ four principals of witness to guide our relationships. Most of our volunteers must pass through a threshold that we call and an application. The development of our volunteers is very important to us. To learn more about the questions we encourage people to ask when they explore an intentional connection with Good Works, visit our website and click on WHO WE ARE.

This is my 38th year with Good Works. I am much more focused on leadership development and sustainability these days. My energy is directed towards “equipping” people to identify, name, and use the gifts God has given them, as they grow deeper in their intimate relationship with Christ and their love and service to people.

In 2012, Darlene and I moved from our home in the countryside back into the city of Athens only 100 steps from our The Timothy House. Our move was intentional. We wanted to create space to expand our vision of hospitality and take people into *our* home that the Timothy House had to turn away because of space limitations. We have continued to do this for several years and God continues to supply JOY. I am happy to talk with anyone who has an interest in exploring what it might look like to provide this form of hospitality in your home (Isaiah 58:7).

I have been following Jesus for 43 years. I still feel a growing passion in my love for the LORD, passion in my love for people (especially the vulnerable) with a strong commitment to discipleship; and passion and energy for the unity of the body of Christ.

Keith Wasserman, February 22, 2018