

*‘Unless the LORD builds the house, the laborers labor in vain’ – Psalm 127:1*

**Sign of HOPE Groundbreaking Speech**

September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019

11:00 am

Greetings with JOY and gratitude.

FOR MANY YEARS, we have said homelessness is a “we” problem. The solution to homelessness is a “we” solution. We still believe that today! It takes a community, and this community (and this neighborhood) has been very supportive to Good Works over *many* years. I’ve said many times: Good Works is really an example, indeed a testimony of what a community can do when it works together to love their neighbors!

THANK YOU for being present today.

Thank you – **many of you** who contributed to our vision, both those of you who gave as individuals and families and those here representing institutions.

And THANK YOU, every one of you who have walked alongside us. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, because of the grace, mercy and love of God, I will start my 40<sup>th</sup> year leading Good Works.

This day marks a new vision of Good Works to provide hospitality to another segment of our community – people with physical disabilities! We will be building two first-floor bedrooms with bathrooms each with an exterior entrance.

As some of you know, Good Works has a **paradigm of hospitality**. Beginning with our home on Elliott street in 1981 and moving to what is now called The Timothy House in 1984, we have viewed our work not so much as an agency but as a ministry. In 1994, we expanded to what we now call the Good Works property on Luhrig Road and began a few years later to host and welcome small intergenerational groups of ‘mission minded’ people. They came to serve our neighbors in Athens County who are widowed or struggling with a disability. For the past 22 years, we have hosted between 30-40 groups each year from Ohio,

Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky and other states. We call this initiative Neighbors Helping Neighbors.

Soon after we purchased the Good Works property on Luhrig Road we built a solitude retreat cabin (named the Carter Cabin in 2012 to honor Bob Carter ) to provide hospitality to anyone who wants a time of silence and solitude. This is a free service we provide and people use this frequently. We then built our Administrative building and our Bed and Breakfast (2002) and we host anyone visiting Athens who wants a “hotel like” accommodation. All revenue from our B&B goes to cover our utility costs on that Good Works property.

And so... we are about to build our 5<sup>th</sup> expression of hospitality. It was said of Abraham and Sarah, written about in the Old Testament book of Genesis that they *welcomed* strangers. WE too find a unique JOY and inner strength to welcoming strangers!

As some of you know, in 2013, Darlene and I moved into this neighborhood for the specific purpose of opening **our** home to those the Timothy House had to turn away because of space. We walk over each night someone needs a place to stay at 10:00 pm and walk each person or family back to our house. We have not had one problem with anyone staying with us – not one problem. We have called this initiative Sign of HOPE for the past 7 years and today we are ready to move that language to this new house.

Today we break ground (well... ground has been broken) on Sign of HOPE. The vision for this house is to serve adults in a housing crisis who have a physical disability that prevents them from climbing stairs. We have seen this kind of situation for many years and we have been grieved. Today begins a new era. Each of the two first-floor bedrooms will have an exterior entrance to a bedroom and a bathroom. This house will also serve some of the overflow from the TH when necessary. We also HOPE to serve adults who have pets. This is not something we have been able to do in the past.

As much as possible, this house will be built by volunteers. Already we have had volunteers do the initial excavation and construct of our retaining wall. We are so very thankful for the partnerships which enable us to carry out our mission. Partnerships based on integrity, good-communication, and trust.

January will mark the start of our 40<sup>th</sup> year loving and serving our neighbors. Most of you know we feel a commission from God to serve the stranger, the widow and children who struggle with poverty. When we began, we did not have the language to describe the people staying in our basement on Elliott Street. In 1984, we discovered that they were called “The Homeless”. We don’t use that phrase today because we are learning how important it is to separate what has happened to someone from their primary identity as a human being. We prefer the more awkward phrase “people without homes”.

THANK YOU, each of you who have contributed to this vision. Listed on the board next to me are the organizations, businesses, foundations and churches who provided financial support to Sign of HOPE. Many individuals and families also contributed but they are not listed here.

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Several years ago, Lisa Simon representing the Athens Marathon, contacted me and expressed a desire to help Good Works build a house. The Athens Marathon is contributing one hundred thousand dollars today – half of the cost of this house. This is the largest single donation to Good Works in our history.

THANK YOU!

And thank you, those here representing some of the organizations on the board.

IN CLOSING ...

First, I want to PRAISE GOD for God’s faithfulness over these many years to sustain Good Works with people, resources and vision. Today, Good Works has zero debt!

I want to give thanks for Darlene who has walked with me for 38 years (our anniversary was last Thursday 9/26).

I want to express my gratitude to all of my co-workers. Please join us for a few refreshments at The Timothy House and meet some of our staff.

I want to say a word about the Hickman family who lived here and who sold Good Works this property more than 10 years ago. This area of the west side has been home to several African American families over the years.

Although there were a few African-American families recorded in Athens village in the 1850 and 1860 censuses, it was after the Civil War when an influx of African-American families occurred. By 1870, (according to the SE Ohio History Museum) 29% of the residents of Athens village and township were Black.

While some Black families lived elsewhere in Athens, the majority of the working-class families lived along Dean Avenue, now called West Washington St. from Lancaster Street west to the Hocking Valley railroad depot.

Many Black families lived along Central, Shafer (originally named Cemetery St.), and West State, etc.

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I want to leave you with a few words about HOPE

### **A WORD ABOUT HOPE**

Is it possible the central problem of our age is  
not too much stress but too little HOPE?

MANY of the people we serve come to us after experiencing a loss of HOPE. Yes, there is a loss of housing and with it a loss of food and safety. There is emotional distress, recovery issues and a lack of a support system ....

But it is our vision to address the loss of HOPE because it is HOPE that carries all of us beyond our circumstances into the future of possibilities. How do we help people see their present and future through the lens of HOPE? How do we show love and use heart-felt words and service to convey and deposit hope? These are the things this *community of hope* prays about, thinks about, and acts on.

Most of you know, for us, HOPE is rooted in our relationship with God.

Hope .... means a change in belief about my expectations for a positive future. It is not just a change in my situation but indeed a change in belief.

Hope .... means having a reasonable expectation that the future can be better than the past. Part of HOPE is believing that this is possible.

To deposit HOPE in others, one has to experience and live it. This is not something people can buy, nor in my view something that can be learned through the classroom. The HOPE that carries me along is received from God and a community that reminds me every day that I am clothed with dignity and have value simply because I have been made in the image of God; and, that I have something to offer others by being with them and being who I am.

HOPE .... pulls us into the future and gives us something in the present that draws us forward and that is our identity. We begin to have a sense of who we are because we have hope.

People feel hope when they have a sense that there are legitimate opportunities that they can access. That happens when they are connected to a community.

Sign of HOPE is one of those opportunities.

Thank you for making this possible!