

Christ Church Grosse Pointe Partnership with the Inner City

The roots of Christ Episcopal Church Grosse Pointe partnership with a congregation in Detroit began in December 1988. Parishioner, Bob Feeser, who was on special assignment from First America Bank, proposed the partnership with Joy of Jesus to the rector, Ted Cobden. Joy of Jesus was a “grass roots” organization attempting to improve the lives of residents in the Ravenwood area near City Airport.

After a year of planning and a year of joint series and potlucks, the relationship was not working. But, the seed had been planted and Ted Cobden began looking for a better alternative. Ted believed that “outreach worked best when it was nearby and focused”. His relationship with Ron Spann, the rector of Church of the Messiah, proved an obvious opportunity. Ted and Ron each invited specific parishioners to participate and the partnership was born in 1991.

The rectors met monthly, regardless of the committee schedule. Both believed that the primary focus had to be the *faith relationship*.

This was not our first involvement with Church of the Messiah. In 1988 Diane Jahnke organized a Christmas Gift Project. This project continues and annually provides gifts for about 125 people who are served by the Church of the Messiah Community.

The leadership at both churches believed that we needed to learn about each other, if the partnership was to be successful. Early meetings included bible study and discussion. This helped us learn about each other through our common spiritual bond. We also read *With Justice for All* by John Perkins and *The Content of our Character* by Shelby Steele. Discussion centered on these readings focused on the problems of the inner city – racial, sociological, and economic – and the problems generated by stereotypical thinking from both the urban and suburban members of the partnership.

From these discussions, we learned what their needs were and how our resources might be mobilized to meet their needs.

Ron Spann suggested that we join the Christian Community Development Association (John Perkins’ response to the problem of the inner-city).

Balance is the key to a successful partnership and one way we did that was to alternate meetings between the two churches. The first year we met on a weekday afternoon but that soon proved difficult for people to schedule. A Christ Church member suggested meeting in the evening. The response was unanimous. Ron Spann told us later that “it had never occurred to them that we would be comfortable coming down there after dark; and it had never occurred to us to not be – comfortable. This was an important step toward building mutual trust,” recalled Helen Santiz.

The first joint project was joining Church of the Messiah and the Islandview Development Corporation in their annual paint-a-house project. “The participation of Christ Church Grosse Pointe helped strengthen this organization during its early years,” said Ron Spann. This initial event was well organized and had high turnout on both sides. Painters, flower planters, organizers of children's

activities, and lunch providers were on hand. The project was repeated about two years later. In addition, a Messiah Housing Corporation day of planting trees, shrubs and flowers around El Tovar (under the guidance of Greening of Detroit) was very successful.

Early in the Partnership, we began collecting grocery items for the Messiah Senior Pantry, run by Pat Mentzer; and clothing items taken down there have either been given away or sold at a nominal price at their rummage sale. Helen Santiz began tutoring kids after school, and has ended up mentoring some of them.

In the second year we planned a picnic together. The decision was to do it on Belle Isle, partly because we wanted to communicate our willingness and comfort about being in the city. Organized by two co-directors (one from each church), the tasks were divided between the two churches. An informal worship service was a part of the day, and Greg Sammons led singing.

The second year we proposed having the picnic at the Farms Pier Park, partly to communicate that they were welcome in our community.

The picnics have been a big success and have been held every year, except 1996. The event is especially well attended by families with children.

Some years ago, a group from Christ Church Grosse Pointe attended a conference on Christian Community Development at Church of the Messiah. The speaker was John Perkins.

During that time, Beyond Parish Ministry helped fund the building of a special storeroom for some Church of the Messiah parishioners who wanted to start a grassroots business.

Also during this time period, the vestry determined that a portion of the Antiques Show profits would be funneled through Beyond Parish Ministry. Church of the Messiah was one of the "big 3", taking turns at being one of three organization that received those funds. In 199x we learned that there was no budget for a rector's salary at Church of the Messiah. That year the entire amount of the monies from the Antiques Show was given to Church of the Messiah, so that they would have something to offer in their search for a new rector.

About four years ago, three of the women of Church of the Messiah expressed an interest in joining Daughters of the King. They became members of our chapter, and this has expanded our interaction into a whole new realm.

We have invited their parishioners to be our guests at all of our musical performances. A few have come, and their tickets are covered by Beyond Parish Ministry. And during this same time, our Bell Choir has performed at Church of the Messiah about four times, including providing a service of lessons and carols to help tide them over while they had no rector. The Choir of Men and Boys also sang at Church of the Messiah prior to one of the trips to England.

In 1995, when the tenth grade at University-Liggett was looking for something more meaningful to do to help less fortunate people, their advisor, Christ Church Grosse Pointe parishioner John Fowler, inquired about providing the makings of Thanksgiving Dinner for nine Church of the

Messiah families (or the equivalent). Pat Mentzer, of the Church of the Messiah Senior Pantry was able to provide them with names and coordinate things at that end. It has been done each year since.

For many years, the Caritas Players of Church of the Messiah have been invited to perform their musicals ("Esther", "Judith", and "Jesus' Women") at the Sunday Forum. Turnout has been good, and appreciation by our parishioners enormous. We videotaped the last one, and each participant has received a copy of it. During Summer '97 we tried to plan a joint performance of their other (longer and more adult) musical, "Ruth"; but we were in over our heads in many ways, so the project was tabled.

In 1996 and 1997, men from Church of the Messiah were guests of our men at the Promise Keepers gathering, and the Christ Church Grosse Pointe men were guests of Church of the Messiah for a breakfast beforehand. Both lay and clergy were involved.

In Fall '96, the two churches shared a very successful day of planting trees and shrubs at the Field Street townhouses, again with the help of Greening of Detroit. (One of those trees is dedicated to Ellie Wiener, of Christ Church Grosse Pointe.)

In December 1996, a week before Christmas, we were notified that a Church of the Messiah family had been burned out of their apartment. An announcement was made from the pulpit that Sunday, and over the course of the next month, almost all the basic household necessities were replaced. In the spring, we learned that the three boys in the family had lost their bikes in the fire; and the oldest was now walking three miles to his after-school job. The Christ Church Grosse Pointe congregation responded with 16 bikes. The husband of one of the Bell Choir members put the bikes in "good as new" condition. Three bikes were given to the family and the other given to other Church of the Messiah people. The "bike request" has evolved into a somewhat on-going exchange of items to be donated, and needs that people have. The bulletin boards at Church of the Messiah and the Christ Church Grosse Pointe Sunday bulletin have become the means for this exchange.

Over the years there have been many pulpit exchanges, including Steve Bartlett doing our 1997 Thanksgiving service. In addition, members of Christ Church Grosse Pointe attended both Ron Spann's last service and Steve Bartlett's installation; and Ron and Steve attended Ed Putnam's installation.

A few years ago, Fr. Benedict, the abbot at Three Rivers Abbey, and a good friend of the Jackie and Ron Spann (he preached at their wedding), participated in an evening retreat/worship service at Church of the Messiah, preceded by a light supper. It involved shared feelings, prayer, and a Eucharist service, and was attended by a large number of members of each parish.

In January 1996, the Partnership Committee organized its first potluck, as a celebration of Ron's ministry. Ron had recently announced his retirement from Church of the Messiah. This event brought out people who weren't interested in picnics. Thus, we began looking at a new direction for the social interaction. We have since invited Church of the Messiah parishioners to join us as our guests at such events as the Pancake Supper and the Spaghetti Supper. Because transportation is a problem for many of them, we offered to provide a vanpool, and that made a huge difference. Church of the Messiah has also held some of its retreats in our facilities.

In 1997 we learned of the tile fund-raising program. Artisans at Pewabic Tile trained interested Church of the Messiah members in the art of tile making. Several designs have been fabricated. By making the tiles available between services and at the Greens Sale, we raised \$1500 toward their repair of the nave. These tiles have been sold during the Antiques Show and are currently available in the Cloister Bookshop.

Barb Perez volunteered her time in the Church of the Messiah office two mornings a week, to supplement the part-time coverage that the church could afford. And one Christ Church Grosse Pointe family donated their about-to-be-replaced van to the Church of the Messiah Senior Pantry, to replace the one that was on its last legs.

When we put out our book of Lenten Meditations, Peter Klein was invited to contribute, and this year Steve Bartlett wrote one of the items. Copies were provided for Church of the Messiah. For next year, the Worship Committee would like this to be a full-fledged team effort--including a contribution by at least one of their mentally challenged members (presumably dictated to someone).

Not all the projects are group focused. Susan Swoish worked with a mentally challenged Church of the Messiah parishioner, to help him learn to print his first name so that he would be able to write more than just an X for his signature. And Erica Hill invited the Church of the Messiah youth to go rock climbing with Christ Church Grosse Pointe youth group. It didn't work out, but sounds promising if we can plan further ahead. And just a few weeks ago, a Christ Church Grosse Pointe couple donated the leftover azalea plants from their daughter's wedding to Church of the Messiah.

1998: A friend of Helen Santiz', knowing about our partnership, arranged for Ford Motor Co. to donate 10-12 IBM 486 computers to Church of the Messiah. The Ferraras prepared all the donated computers with Windows '95 and CD_ROMS.

Over the years, there have apparently been many situations where individual Christ Church Grosse Pointe parishioners have been called upon by Ted Cobden to help individual Church of the Messiah parishioners with special problems--legal, medical, etc.

There have also been ways in which Church of the Messiah parishioners have helped Christ Church Grosse Pointe. For a number of years now, young people from Church of the Messiah have helped dealers unload their trucks and trailers for the Antiques Show; and Marion Canty ("Candy") has worked with Helen Santiz on a Habitat house. We have hopes of getting our two youth groups (and maybe the adults too) together to work on the current project of the Grosse Pointe Habitat group. A few years ago, Ron's Uncle Emerson baked a wonderful pineapple upside-down cake for the Partnership Committee, to say thank you for the gifts he received through the Christmas Gift Project; and just last month, Barry Randolph baked and decorated an exceptional cake for Erica Hill's birthday. And we are remembers on their prayer lists, as we remember them in ours.

During this year the Partnership Committee began stressing the importance of involving both parishes in each other's activities. Christ Church Grosse Pointe began including prayers for Church of the Messiah in every service insert.

1999: Ed Putnam agreed to have Christ Church Grosse Pointe participate in Church of the Messiah's Epiphany service. It was an idea that was truncated by bad weather and poor communication.

We were in the middle of the construction program for the new Education Wing. Ed Putnam proposed including Church of the Messiah tiles somehow in the new Christ Church Grosse Pointe addition.

Three Church of the Messiah members contributed to the Lenten booklet.

In an effort to meet the on-going need of repair to the Church of the Messiah, Ed Putnam suggested there should be sources in the diocese for Church of the Messiah to repair their roof.

Concerned about the lack of attendance at the join picnic, Ed Putnam suggested we advertise the picnic as just the Christ Church Grosse Pointe annual picnic, inviting Church of the Messiah to join us. It was thought this might increase Christ Church Grosse Pointe turnout.

Some Church of the Messiah members who came to help with the Antiques Show were treated badly by one particular dealer, so a letter was drafted to go out to all future dealers regarding the treatment we expect.

A Christ Church Grosse Pointe parishioner, Laura Huebner, helped with the after-school reading program at Church of the Messiah.

Mutual Ministry began its training stage at Church of the Messiah.

2000: Helen Santiz began posting Christ Church Grosse Pointe activities monthly at Church of the Messiah, as a running invitation to participate.

Five Church of the Messiah parishioners contributed to the Lenten booklet.

Shannon MacVean-Brown submitted a mock-up of a tile hanging for the new addition, and research began on how to hang it.

- We agreed to participate jointly in the program around the new African-American Jubilee Edition of the Bible. With Ed Putnam's departure, we ended up without any clergy to lead us, which was difficult. Church of the Messiah was well prepared for the event, but Christ Church Grosse Pointe had trouble recruiting participants, and some tension resulted.

The picnic was on the lawn of Christ Church Grosse Pointe for the first time.

2001: Ed Brown of Christ Church Grosse Pointe helped Church of the Messiah get the diocesan grant to have their roof repaired, and his company did an A-1 job for a bargain basement price.

A Christ Church Grosse Pointe parishioner donated a chair lift to Church of the Messiah so that those who are physically challenged could get from the nave to the restroom.

After much effort, it was finally learned that it was not legally possible to retrofit the device.

Thirty copies of "Lift Every Voice and Sing II" were donated to Church of the Messiah so they wouldn't have to photocopy so much of their service music.

Some Church of the Messiah youth joined Christ Church Grosse Pointe youth on a mission trip, with scholarships from Christ Church Grosse Pointe.

The picnic took a dramatic leap, thanks to Barry Randolph from Church of the Messiah and Mary Margaret Block from Christ Church Grosse Pointe doing the planning. They arranged games, a magician, a clown, a tug-of-war, and face-painting.

This year Christ Church Grosse Pointe initiated the Alpha Program. Many members of Church of the Messiah participated in the class. Many new friendships were formed. This boosted the partnership greatly, and prepared Church of the Messiah to run their own Alpha class the following year.

Church of the Messiah celebrated their 100th anniversary at their location. Six people from Christ Church Grosse Pointe (with their "groupies") participated in the program by singing two songs.

Christ Church Grosse Pointe initiated a series of meetings of Christian and Muslim women. Pat Mentzer of Church of the Messiah also participated.

The mutual ministry team was commissioned in December.

2002: The Canon 9 priests at Church of the Messiah were ordained. [Canon 9 priests are only allowed to do the sacraments in their own church; and they can receive no pay for their priestly duties, so they must have an outside job.]

Messiah ran their own Alpha class. Christ Church Grosse Pointe donated a full set of the videos to help with this. Barry later ran what he called "ghetto Alpha" for the teenagers and it was a big hit.

A larger table was provided this year at the Holiday Boutique for selling the tiles and other items to support the work at Church of the Messiah..

2003: About 20 members from Christ Church Grosse Pointe participated in the Church of the Messiah Epiphany service and potluck.

Garrett Myers arranged for some very nice office furniture for Church of the Messiah. This took care of the church office and the "sunshine room".

Many from Church of the Messiah attended Christ Church Grosse Pointe's Mardi Gras Party.

Shannon MacVean-Brown was persuaded by the Bishop to study for full--i.e. non-canon 9--priesthood) left in the fall for a year at seminary.

Garrett Myers and Peter Ferrara from Christ Church Grosse Pointe proposed trying to close the "digital divide" for Church of the Messiah.

Ron Spann named director of the new Center for Spirituality at Christ Church Grosse Pointe. David Dieter began guiding the partnership.

Plans were made to jointly serve meals on September 6 to the 300 volunteers at the September Habitat Blitz Build.

Another great picnic with the best turnout to date.

Shannon's tile hanging was finished and dedicated in September. A committee is working out a plan on how and where to mount the piece.

At David Dieter's suggestion, a facilitator was hired to help the Partnership reinvent itself in order to adapt to the changes in the leadership of both congregations. (Outreach Funding paid for the facilitator, Jan Palmer, who was from the National Council for Community Justice.

2004: The meetings with the facilitator were wrapped up, and we began looking for a mutual project to work on.

David and Barry decided that Church of the Messiah's relationship with Bellevue Elementary School and David's involvement in setting up an after-school program at All Saints (Bound Together) presented an ideal opportunity for the mutual project.

A site visit was made to All Saints, Pontiac, and they offered to mentor us in setting up a program.

The Detroit Public Schools announced that Bellevue was being closed; so a new project was needed.

2005: Feeling discouraged after the elementary after-school project fell through; we marked time a little bit.

The summer camp at Church of the Messiah received financial assistance from a grant that Sarah Wheeler of Christ Church Grosse Pointe had gotten for outreach; and many people from Christ Church Grosse Pointe volunteered for the four afternoons a week for four weeks, helping to work with the children.

In the fall, Church of the Messiah was chosen to run a middle-school after-school program three days a week. Some members of Christ Church are going there on Mondays and Thursdays (the tutoring days) and providing enrichment when tutoring is not needed.

Two couples from Christ Church are taking turns going to spend time with two young siblings at Church of the Messiah.

Shannon's tile piece was hung in the Undercroft at Christ Church in November.

Three members of Church of the Messiah were inducted into Christ Church's chapter of Daughters of the King.

A dozen members of Church of the Messiah were invited to Lessons and Carols at Christ Church; and there was a wonderful party afterward, ending in a gospel-fest.

The Christ Church Children's Choir sang at a service at Church of the Messiah in December and it was a great hit.

Plans have begun to form a joint team for the cancer fund-raising walk "Relay for Life" at the Farms Pier Park in May '06.

Editor's Note: This history has been excerpted from a paper presented by Helen Santiz to the clergy and vestry at Christ Church in the beginning of 2006.