

New Neighbor Care Group Update

Dear Church,

We wanted to bring you an update on our efforts in serving our new migrant and refugee neighbors in Chicago, as well as explain the process and progression by which we came to consider offering a space on our campus for housing.

Our New Neighbor Care Efforts So Far

Our efforts as a church so far have included donating clothing through Amazon Wishlists, donating coats and clothing to local organizations directly serving these families (Nuevos Vecinos / Cradles to Crayons / Care For Real). Additionally, we've been partnering with Swift Elementary donating coats for kids and weekly snacks (Snacks 4 Swift). We've also been working at, and in close contact with, local organizations and their efforts to take care of our new neighbors at the Armory, including: Care for Real, Centro Romero and the 48th Ward Office

Sandy Clarke and Meg Parks have reached out personally to take care of families and walk alongside them in their journeys. Rick Parks has been bringing Bibles to folks and local outreach organizations. However, there seems to be a desire and a heart in our church for taking care of the families sheltering at the Broadway Armory (and other new neighbor families throughout the City) in a more intentional and relational way. So, as a group, we've been working at identifying ways that we can be more involved than what we are already. For instance: one idea was to host "play-dates" in the gym where moms / dads can bring their kids and we can work on our Spanish while they work on their English and our kids play. But school started and we're not close enough to the Armory geographically where this makes sense to host in our gym

So, during a meeting in November, the New Neighbor Care Group decided to pursue hosting a coat drive; and we shortly afterwards signed up with the 48th Ward Alderwoman's office to take the lead on the next coat drive with FreeStyle – a Not-for-Profit that connects with organizations that host "pop-up" coat drives to bring warm clothing into various neighborhoods throughout the City. But again: Because we're so far away from the Armory, this turned into a coat drive that we would coordinate, but would hold at a facility / church closer to the Armory. This eventually turned into a coat drive + hot meal which was going to happen before Christmas, but hasn't yet materialized.

As we continue to press into, pray and pursue what God might be calling us to do, we've continued to stay involved. During the 48th Ward bi-weekly meetings, Alderwoman Manaa-Hoppenworth's office gives updates on their work, as well as the ongoing work of local Community-based Organizations; and is working to network all of our efforts. Additionally, they continually identify and update and new gaps in the care for our new neighbor families. Current needs include: warm clothing, Spanish-speaking volunteers at local organizations, ESL training, help processing applications for work permits and semi-permanent housing. We're already helping with clothing, and we're volunteering at local organizations. However, we have limited capacity for ESL training, and we lack the infrastructure to process paperwork for work permits - but we do have space.

Space/Facilities - How do we use this resource?

Our facilities are used throughout the week. Facilities Team Deacon Dan Tallacksen has been doing great work to build out our space-sharing agreements; there are various AA groups, kids day camps, and other organizations that use our facilities throughout the week, and some folks office out of our spaces. Our Facilities Director, Adolfo Ramirez and his team are doing great work in taking care of all of the buildings that we have been blessed with the opportunity to steward.

Working with the Faith Community Initiative (FCI)

Over the last number of months, we've been testing doors to see which ones open and which ones close. The doors that keep opening seem to be on the pathway towards bringing in a family. As we've been doing that, we've become aware of an organization that connects churches with families that need housing, and also provides some infrastructure to support the effort: Faith Community Initiative ("FCI"). We've visited and had conversations with north-side churches that are working with FCI, and FCI volunteered to meet with us to examine what potential we have for hosting a family or families – which they did right before Christmas. FCI "interviewed" us and our buildings, and they left very excited about the possibilities we have for housing folks on our campus for a time.

If we do partner with FCI in this way, we're committing to somewhere between 8 to 12 months. This time frame allows a family to leave a shelter, simultaneously process their paperwork and eventually be approved for a work permit so that they can get work and then find more permanent housing on their own. Some may recall that we hosted a family from Angola a little more than a year ago in one of our apartments; we've learned from that experience. However, this is also a little heavier lift from the standpoint that it's going to take an investment to get a space ready for a family to live in it – and it's expected that it will be about \$1K per month in living expenses.

Analysis of our Available Spaces

There are five spaces we as a Group have considered for housing.

Space #1: 2nd Floor old K-5 space above the youth room

Space #2: Street Level 5241 Office Building

Space #3: Garden Workshop 5237 Four-flat

Space #4: Gymnasium

Space #5: One of the apartments in 5237 building

Each of these spaces could accommodate different individuals / family group configurations, need varying levels of investment in order to prepare the space, and would take different amounts of time to bring online. Please see the additional attached PDF for a diagram of the available spaces and some additional analysis around costs, resources, and improvements needed to house a family.

Space #2, the Street level of the 5241 Office building, is the primary space under consideration for housing our new neighbors at this time. ***So, we as the New Neighbor Care Group open-handedly bring this possibility before the congregation for consideration and discernment for what God may be asking us to do in this season of crisis.***