

New church takes on homeless as mission

Paul B. Johnson

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HIGH POINT – The passion of their purpose is palpable as the Rev. Kevin Williams and two members of Monument of Praise Ministries speak about their commitment to a community where they held services for the first time last month.

The congregation, with a decades-long history in Greensboro, established services at a sanctuary on Pearson Place near downtown. Monument of Praise, which held its first services March 14, already has nearly 300 members who fill the pews of the church adorned with intricate stained-glass squares inset along the interior walls of the worship hall.

But Monument of Praise's members have a greater goal than filling seats each Sunday. The churchgoers want to transform what once was a vibrant neighborhood in the black community through outreach and assistance to the homeless.

As Williams, church Administrator Wil Coleman and Economic Development Specialist Armina Swittenburg stroll along Pearson Place, they gesture to boarded-up homes they envision becoming residences for those in need. They want to secure vacant houses around the church and revive them to provide safe, self-sustaining homes that can transform the lives of homeless men, women and families.

"The church is about community. It's the only place where there is no sense of hierarchy, where it doesn't matter if you have \$300,000 or 3 cents," Williams said.

Coleman said Sunday services at Monument of Praise feature members who are doctors and lawyers sharing their faith next to homeless men and women.

The church recently received the first donation of a corner lot and house through members of the family of local historian Glenn Chavis. Converting vacated houses to a refuge for the homeless is only one part of Monument of Praise's mission.

The church takes a holistic approach to helping homeless individuals turn around circumstances, from providing education, counseling and job search assistance to offering full meals served in the fellowship hall. Each Sunday the church feeds 40 to 50 homeless people, Williams said.

For Williams, a seemingly nondescript moment during the brutally cold winter late last year brought home the issue. As he was dashing to his automobile parked outside his other church, New Jerusalem Cathedral in Greensboro, Williams flung open the car door and savored the warmth. He'd only been outside a minute – suppose he was homeless all that winter day, with no warm place to turn.

"So often homeless people are shunned," he said. "But what happened if you checked your family tree and found someone was homeless?"

pjohnson@hpe.com | 888-3528