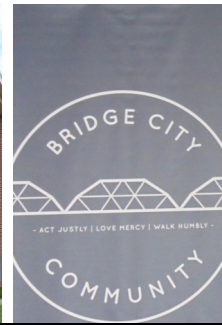


# IMPACT



MAY 2014  
UPDATE

## IN FOCUS... *Planting New Churches*

*This special update on the Mid-South District's IMPACT project focuses on the ministry initiative of "Planting New Churches." The update is a first-hand account shared by the District's Development Officer, Paul Reaves, following a recent visit with Church Planter Pastor Josh Woodrow in Chattanooga.*

**On** April 8, 2014, I met Pastor Josh Woodrow in Chattanooga to spend a day walking alongside him in the Alton Park neighborhood of Chattanooga where God has called him to start a new ministry aptly named Bridge City Community Church. What happened over the course of the day will stay etched in my mind as a perfect example of what God can do to make the seemingly impossible *possible* and provide a community with *hope for the future*.

About a year and half ago, Josh Woodrow was called to Chattanooga to begin planting a church. Josh, by all accounts, is a California-type that most would expect to find near a beach. He is also one who has a profound yearning to reach "the least of these" with the message of hope found only in the Gospel. As Josh began to access the Chattanooga area and pray about where God would have him plant the new church, he discovered the Alton



Park neighborhood. Alton Park is an historic community of Chattanooga that has been forgotten by many. The neighborhood is home to much crime and faces enormous challenges. The neighborhood is also 98% African American; Josh Woodrow is white. Undeterred, he has followed God's lead and over the course of a little more than a year has made inroads into the community gaining the trust of the leaders and the people who call Alton Park "home."

On our walk, we started at Howard High School, a legendary high school founded in 1865 on the fringe of Alton Park. "Pastor Josh" makes weekly visits to Howard to engage students and faculty and to ask about the current needs of the school. While we were there, we met with the Assistant Principal, Matt Taylor. During our conversation, Mr. Taylor related how Howard had recently held the district basketball tournament, which included providing a hospitality area for coaches and referees. Pastor Josh and Bridge City Community Church stepped up and provided the refreshments for the hospitality room. According to Mr. Taylor, what they provided were "not just ordinary refreshments," but ones that made the high school "look good" to their peers from other schools. He was most gracious in his words for Pastor Josh and what it meant to the school to put forth such a professional appearance.

From Howard, we continued our tour at Calvin Donaldson Elementary School located in the heart of the Alton Park community. Pastor Josh walked in and was immediately greeted by the staff who welcomed us and were happy to see us. We first met with Tammy Sitton, the Community Outreach Coordinator at the school. Calvin Donaldson is a Title 1 school, meaning the children come from a challenging economic situation, qualifying them to receive a free breakfast and lunch at school. Tammy not only serves as the school's Outreach Coordinator, but wears other hats as

well, including slicing the fruit for the day as we walked into her office. It was immediately apparent that Tammy was glad to see Pastor Josh. She quickly shared what a difference his presence was making at the school. As she puts it, “Josh is real. He shows up, and does what he says he’s going to do” — a quality which has gained him tremendous respect from both the faculty and the students.

After our visit with Tammy, we stopped by the fifth grade classroom. Pastor Josh simply knocked on the door, the teacher gladly let him interrupt the class and we talked with the students for a few minutes. Some of them thought I was the Mayor! Josh assured them I wasn’t. From there we met with Mrs. Starnes, the Assistant Principal, who again confirmed the work Pastor Josh is doing and the important role model he is for the students, 87% of which come from single parent homes. Before we left, Mrs. Starnes handed Josh a handwritten note she had planned to mail to him. She had tears in her eyes; I had some in mine too. Pastor Josh shows up every week at the school and it’s clear from the reaction of students and faculty alike that he is making a difference in the attitudes and hopes of each person he comes in contact with.



*Pastor Josh Woodrow (center) is joined by community friends Charmane Goins (L) and Marcus Thomas. All three share a love for the people of Alton Park and have invested themselves to restore hope to this struggling community.*

From the school, we ventured to the South Chattanooga Youth and Family Development Center where we met with the facility Director, Marcus Thomas. Marcus grew up in the Alton Park neighborhood and has returned to his childhood home to give back to the community. Marcus related how he wasn’t sure about Pastor Josh and his motives at first, but now fully embraces him and his message of hope — a message he shares and longs for in Alton Park. On Tuesday

nights, Pastor Josh and the church provide a meal at the Center for children and adults. This dinner may very well be the only meal of the day for some and the only dinner option for many, particularly the children. Marcus thanked Pastor Josh for the support and for helping whenever and in whatever way he and the church can.

After the Center visit, it was time for lunch at Champy’s, a local Chattanooga restaurant with as good a fried chicken as one could hope for. I did all I could to eat my fair share! Pastor Josh, Marcus and I were joined by Pastor Mark McCrory from First Lutheran Church in Chattanooga (Bridge City’s sponsoring church), Bridge City supporter Nancy Allen, and Charmane Goins who is the Director of Small Business Development for LAUNCH Chattanooga. Charmane works with individuals wanting to start new businesses by helping them develop their plans and secure funding. Pastor Josh and Charmane have become friends and share the same passion to help people and the Alton Park neighborhood. At lunch, Charmane shared his story and his commitment to helping others, regardless of their past or current circumstances. Charmane, like Pastor Josh, is providing a sense of hope where often there seems to be little.

So where does Bridge City Community Church go from here? Pastor Josh and the church continue to engage the Alton Park neighborhood, meeting people and building trust. On May 10, a support banquet will be held for the new ministry which will provide critical resources for the church to continue spreading the message of hope. On August 17, the church will launch its public worship at the South Chattanooga Youth and Family Development Center, bringing the Good News of Jesus in a powerful way to the people of Alton Park. Most importantly, the church will continue to be a beacon of light and a source of hope for many people who need a warm touch and caring hand.

I invite you to learn more about Pastor Josh and Bridge City Community Church and how they are helping to transform a neighborhood. Who knows... you might even want to take a walk some day with Pastor Josh and experience first-hand what it’s like to truly feel a sense of hope — a hope which comes only through knowing you are a child of God.



Stay connected with Pastor Josh and his new ministry on Facebook:  
[facebook.com/bridgecitycommunity](https://facebook.com/bridgecitycommunity)