

Urban Ministry: The Brinkley Heights Story

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[Editor's note: The following article is not an academic presentation. I asked Pastor Cox to share the incredible story of an urban church that experienced revitalization. His personal sacrifice, faith, and commitment have made an impact in a very needy area of Memphis. He has been amazingly effective as an Anglo pastor of a multiethnic church in a primarily African-American community. Much more could be said about the Brinkley Heights experience, but the following will exemplify the grace of God in today's cities. All names, other than that of the pastor, have been changed.]

“How come our church is only open two days a week?” That was one of the questions the small group of new believers asked during my first weeks of pastoring their small church in an impoverished urban area of Memphis. When I tried to explain, their reaction caught me off guard. “Well people in our neighborhood need God every day,” one of them said. “Why can't we be open every day? We could take shifts; you know, like they do at Wal-Mart.”

I thought the idea was ridiculous, but that's exactly what they did. They posted the times the church would be open on the sign out front and then took turns (shifts) coming up to the church, opening the doors, and sitting on the front porch. As people walked by, they would ask how they were doing and then ask if they needed any prayer today. I was amazed at how many people would stop. Often, after prayer, tears were streaming down their faces. Repeatedly we heard the same thing, “No one has ever done that for me before.”

It was 1989. I was an associate pastor at Southcrest Baptist Church in Southaven, Mississippi, when Brinkley Heights Baptist Church requested a guest preacher for a Sunday. I accepted the assignment. I had never been involved in

any kind of urban work, and certainly knew nothing about poverty situations. I remember walking up to the small white brick church building. It was a hot August day and I was looking forward to that cool rush of air you feel when you walk into church on a summer Sunday morning. However, as I walked across the street toward the church I noticed that the front doors of the church were standing wide open.

“They’re letting all the cool air out of the church,” I thought. I was wrong. There wasn’t any cool air in the church because it had no air-conditioning! Culture shock was about to begin.

Only a handful of people were there. They were young adults wearing jeans, t-shirts, and tennis shoes, not at all what I was used to on a Sunday morning. At the podium, I looked down the center isle straight out the open doors to the street outside. I could see people walking by on the sidewalk. After a few minutes, I noticed a man had stopped and was looking in. He seemed to be trying to hear what I was saying. His appearance was very peculiar with a long scraggly beard and long scraggly hair. His clothes were old and worn. He stood there for a moment, but then walked into the church, sat down on the back pew, and took off his cap. I remember thinking, “Wow, a homeless guy just walked into the church. Wouldn’t it be amazing if a homeless guy got saved?”

I finished my message and asked Tom, the music leader, if he would lead us in a hymn for our invitation. Tom walked up, began strumming on his guitar and belted out the words to the hymn with bone jarring passion. There was only one problem, he couldn’t sing very well, but after a few moments you would forget all about the fact that he couldn’t sing. Tom had an amazing ability to draw folks into his song. Of course, I had never met any of these people, so I didn’t know much about Tom. He told me later he had only been a believer for a short time. He said, “I was a gutter drunk when Jesus found me.” Now he was sober and singing for His Lord!

As Tom sang the invitational hymn, I noticed the street guy in the back seemed like he wanted to respond, but then suddenly Tom stopped singing. I wanted to give the man a little more time, so I asked Tom if he would lead us in the second verse of the song, Tom responded, “The second verse?” I said yes, and he said, “Well okay.” As he began to sing I realized I had never heard these words before; Tom was making them up! I found out later that Tom couldn’t read very well, and he didn’t know all the church songs, so his wife would sing the hymns to him. He played guitar by ear, so he would pick out the melody and memorize the words to the first verse.

The man in the back didn’t respond and I was afraid to ask Tom to sing the third verse because what Tom was singing wasn’t theologically correct, so I decided to end the service and said, “Let’s close our time together with a word of prayer.” As soon as I said that, the homeless man in the back began waving his baseball cap in the air, yelled, “Wait, wait, I need Jesus” and came running down the center isle of the church! If that would have been the only thing that ever happened at that little church in an impoverished urban neighborhood in Memphis, it would have been

enough! Little did we know that this Sunday morning would be the beginning of an incredible journey that changed our lives forever!

The Lord used this small group of believers to turn our lives upside down, or maybe they turned our lives right side up. They kept calling me to come preach for them service after service because they no longer had a pastor. In fact, the church had no staff members, deacons, or leaders. The church only had this small group of young believers who were the fruit of evangelistic efforts by the former pastor. Most of them had been followers of Christ for only a couple of years, and some for less than that. The senior saint in the church had only been a believer for about four years.

The small white brick church building was in extremely poor condition. The ceiling had a noticeable sag and water stains were visible down the walls. In the educational rooms, part of the roof had fallen in. Pigeons were roosting in one of the Sunday School rooms. One of the stained-glass windows in the front of the building had a bullet hole through it and the bullet was still lodged in an inside wall. When it rained, buckets had to be set out all over the building to catch the water coming through the ceiling. It was obvious what needed to happen.

Several larger and nicer Baptist churches were in the area, so I suggested that they consider joining with one of those other churches. They would not even consider it. They said this was their church and they wouldn't fit in at those other churches. I told them that anyone who went to church in the neighborhood was going to go to one of those other churches. Again, their response seemed strange. "We aren't trying to reach people who are going to church," they said, "We're trying to reach people that don't."

They also had some other strange ideas. They thought they were supposed to be doing something about all the evil that was plaguing their neighborhood. Crime, drugs, gangs, and violence just seemed to be a way of life for the neighborhood. They told me about a 4-year-old little boy who was thrown into a scalding hot tub of water by his mom's boyfriend because he wouldn't stop crying. They said, "We need to do something about that." I assured them that we would pray for the little boy, his mom, and even for the man that did that horrible thing.

They told me about a 7-year-old boy who walked to church by himself on Sunday mornings. His name was Bill. His stepfather was a mean drunk. Bill would run and hide in a closet when his stepdad came home drunk (which was just about every night). Bill said he would cover his ears, trying not to hear his momma screaming when his stepdad beat her. The church people said, "We need to do something about that." I told them that we would pray for little Bill.

Then things started getting personal. The more time I spent with them, the more I knew the people they were telling me about. These people were their family and friends. I had known that crime, drugs, and gangs were tremendous problems

impacting thousands of people in Memphis, but I never knew their names. Now, I knew their names!

One Sunday morning, I was preaching on Ephesians 6:2, “Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise.” A young girl was sitting on the front pew beside one of the church ladies. She walked by herself to church. During the sermon I noticed her whispering to the lady next to her and they got up and went to the back of the church. After the service, the lady told me that the girl asked if honoring your father and mother included her momma’s boyfriend. She told me the girl began to cry and told her she was scared that he was going to come back into her bedroom at night.

One afternoon I was out walking and visiting with folks in the neighborhood. An elderly lady lived down at the end of the street. She would always sit outside on her front porch. On this day, I noticed she was not there but her front door was open. As I was talking with neighbors I kept looking for her to come out, but after several minutes I became concerned and walked over to her house. I called out for her through the door, “Are you home?” Suddenly, I heard a scream “Help me” from the back room of the house. I ran inside and found her lying on her bedroom floor in a pool of blood. She had been severely beaten by her adult son. He was addicted to cocaine and wanted money from her, but she didn’t have any. She would have given it to him because she was so scared of him, but she didn’t have any money so her own son tried to beat her to death!

It seemed like every time I would drive up to the church, there was some crisis going on. Someone they knew had been hurt or someone was in trouble. They would always say, “We’ve got to do something about this.” Of course, I would always respond, “Well, we’ll pray for them.” I thought they couldn’t do anything about all the evil and wickedness going on in their community.

After about six months it all came to a head on a cold winter night as people were arriving for Wednesday evening service. Tension filled the small sanctuary along with the bone chilling air. Not only did they not have air-conditioning, they didn’t have heat in the building either! One of the church ladies began telling me about a family she knew that was living in their van. It was about thirty degrees outside and they didn’t have coats for their kids. I told her we would be sure to pray for them. Immediately I saw fire in her eyes. She pointed her finger in my face and with her jaws clinched she started moving her head from side to side. Then she yelled, “We’re through prayin! It’s time for us to do somethin!”

I couldn’t believe she said that! I became angry and walked away to try to calm down. But that was it! I couldn’t believe these poor people. I thought they couldn’t do anything about all the problems. They didn’t have anything. I was working a full-time job because they couldn’t afford to pay me. The building was literally falling in! On Sundays the offering would be nickels, dimes, quarters, and sometimes a few dollar bills. They were even tithing their food stamps!

I decided it was time for me to let them know how things really were. I asked them all to sit down and told them I needed to be “straight up” with them. I told them that I thought it was wonderful that they wanted to help all these people, but it would take a lot of money to do all things they wanted to do, and we just didn’t have it. A young man sitting on the front row immediately raised his hand. He said, “Excuse me pastor, but you don’t have to tell us that we don’t have any money.” Wow, that was a dart through my heart! I had been in their homes and I knew their struggles. The young man then pointed up and said, “Our Father does. Why can’t we be on the front lines and why can’t God send us some supplies? If he’ll send us the supplies, we will retake this neighborhood for Jesus!”

I wish you could have been there on that cold winter night in that little white brick church with water stained walls. I looked out at that small group of people and every one of them were nodding their heads. At that moment I realized they actually believed! Then it hit me, why didn’t I believe? They believed Jesus wanted to do something about all the pain and misery the evil one was inflicting upon their families and friends. They believed Jesus was there when a little 4-year-old boy was thrown into scalding hot water. They believed Jesus was there every time little Bill’s step daddy would come home drunk and Bill would hide in a dark closet covering his ears. They believed Jesus was with Julia when she would lie awake terrified that her mom’s boyfriend was going to come into her room again. Jesus was with Aunt Sarah when her own son beat her and left her lying in a pool of blood in her bedroom floor. They believed Jesus wanted to do something through them!

I asked them if they believed and they all nodded their heads again. I asked them all to come to the altar and pray. I had been their pastor for about six months. I had said “Let’s pray” many times, but I believe that was the first time I said, “Let’s pray” and meant it. I wish you could have heard their prayers. That small group of people huddled around the altar on that cold winter night in that broken-down little church building. One by one they began to pray. They all prayed different prayers, but there was a common theme. “Lord, we want to be on the front lines. Could you send us some supplies?” That was 29 years ago. How would you like to be in the middle of a miracle for 29 years?

The congregation had a list of needs they believed the Lord wanted them to address. They knew people who were out of work and some families needed food and clothes, so they decided to start a food ministry. Their idea of food ministry was for everyone to bring a couple of cans of food and then take a bag full of food to a family in need, pray for them, and leave. Simple as that! It was amazing to see the impact such a simple thing could have on people’s lives.

One Sunday morning, a family we had helped came to church. After the service, the father said, “We decided to come here today to see if there really is a God. If there is, we want to meet Him.” Later that day I took two of our members to the family’s house and the man, his wife, and all three of their children accepted Christ!

As we reached out to more families, the Lord began to send people from other churches to help! We formed an alliance with several larger churches. Brinkley Heights served as the target church in the target community. In 1993, Brinkley Heights Ministry Center was started to provide emergency food, clothing and spiritual counseling. Brinkley Heights' members and volunteers from the alliance churches operated the center three days a week. They also established a tutoring program for children and youth clubs for neighborhood youth as an alternative to gangs. By 1995, the Brinkley Heights Ministry Center had become one of the busiest MIFA emergency service locations in the city, serving over 1,000 families each year. More than 200 children and youth were involved in Brinkley Heights youth programs.

The congregation was passionate about reaching the children living in the community, so they wanted to do a Vacation Bible School. By that time, I knew some of the kids. Most of them weren't church kids. Many of them were causing problems in the neighborhood. However, I agreed to do a Vacation Bible School. We would have to do it outside because there was no air-conditioning in the church. I didn't think many children would come anyway. I was right, at least for the first day. Only a few showed up, but when the church members walked the children home they asked them if they knew any others that might like to come.

The next day, members walked back to their houses to get them and then went to the houses of their friends. They brought dozens of children back with them. By the end of the week about a hundred children were running wild at the first Brinkley Heights Bible Club.

Sammy was only 4-years-old, but he was always getting into trouble. He would yell, scream, and curse. Sammy knew more curse words than I did! They brought him to my office just about every day. One day I decided I was going to break through to Sammy, so I moved my chair to the side of my desk, so I could talk face to face with him. I said, "Sammy, I want you to know something. It doesn't matter how much you yell and scream I'm still going to love you." Do you think that broke through to Sammy? Well something broke because he yelled louder and then began to growl like a dog!

There was a stapler on the corner of my desk and with the fastest move I've ever seen a 4-year-old make Sammy grabbed my stapler and hit me right between my eyes! I grabbed my face and realized he had busted my head open with my own stapler! I knew what I wanted to do to that boy, but by the grace of God I didn't. I wonder what Jesus wanted to do?

Another boy, Ronnie, lived directly across the street from the church. Ronnie was about 12-years-old and made Sammy look like a saint! One day I pulled up to the church and noticed Ronnie standing in his front yard with a BB gun. I wondered who in their right mind would give Ronnie a BB gun. As I walked through the sanctuary, I noticed several BB holes in the windows. I was so angry! I waited a few minutes to

cool off before confronting Ronnie. I walked out the front of the church and Ronnie was on his front porch. I yelled across the street, "Hey Ronnie, could you come over here for a minute?" He walked over and I said, "Ronnie, we've got a problem. Someone has been shooting BB's through the church windows." He looked down at the ground and said "So? I didn't do it."

I told him, "You know what we need around here? We need someone to keep an eye on the church when we're not here." He said, "You do?" I said, "Yea, you know, someone close by that could watch the church and if they see someone over here trying to break in or shooting BB's at the church they could call me, and I could come over here and we could go get them." He said, "I'll do it!" I said, "All right, I'm making you chief of security. If you see anything going on over here just give me a call and we'll get 'em." It was amazing. After I put Ronnie in charge of security we never had another BB hole shot in any of the windows!

The Bible clubs continued to grow, and the Lord continued to send more volunteers to help. The first mission team came from the Baptist Campus Ministry department of the Arkansas Baptist Convention. They had heard that we needed volunteers and they were interested in sending some college students from Arkansas to help. We asked them to help us paint and fix up the sanctuary and to do Bible club in the afternoons. I was a little concerned about people from out of town who were not familiar with our neighborhood working at our church and with our kids.

The day they arrived things were going well. I told them I had an appointment, but I would be back in a couple of hours. I asked them to just make sure they kept the doors locked while I was gone. When I returned, the mission team leader, Gayle, was in the parking lot and I could tell something was wrong. I asked if everything was okay and she said, "No, I can't find the wallet that has all of our trip money in it." She thought it might have fallen out in the van, but she just searched the van and it wasn't there. We searched the whole building but didn't find it, so I asked Gayle if she was sure they hadn't let anyone in the building. She said, "No, we didn't let anyone in. Well, except those two cute little kids." I asked what they looked like and she described them to me. I knew exactly who she was talking about. It was 7-year-old Sarah and her 5-year-old brother Jerry. I told Gayle, "Those kids stole your wallet." She said, "Oh no, they wouldn't have done that."

I knew they would be long gone, but I went out front and looked down the street. Ronnie (Chief of Security) was out on his front porch. I yelled to him, "Hey Ronnie, have you seen any kids hanging around the church?" He said, "Yep, I saw Sarah and Jerry come running out of the church a few minutes ago. They did something didn't they." I said, "They sure did. They stole these peoples' money!" He said, "I knew it, I knew it, I knew it!" I said, "Come on Ronnie, let's go!"

Ronnie came running over to my truck and jumped into the passenger seat. I was about to drive off when I saw Gayle, the missionary lady, standing in the driveway. She said, "Can we go?" I didn't have time to talk to a missionary lady, so I

said, "Get in." Gayle and two of her students jumped in the back seat and we took off. Ronnie started yelling, "There they are! There they are! They're right there coming towards us!" I looked to my right and Sarah and Jerry were running straight towards us! I turned onto Macon Road and noticed they seemed to be running from a white car that was tailing them. I didn't know who that was, but they were chasing them straight towards us.

We had just about reached them when Sarah saw us coming towards them. She quickly looked to her left and saw an opening between two houses with no fence. Ronnie jumped out of the truck and grabbed them as they tried to run past my truck. Then the white car drove up and a lady got out. The lady said, "I am Ms. Jones, from the Department of Children Services." DCS is located right across the street on Jackson Avenue. She said, "I know those two kids. I saw them running across our parking lot and yelled for them to stop but they took off." I said, "Those two kids stole these peoples' money. They stole \$1,200! These people drove hundreds of miles to come here to help us in our neighborhood, and how did we show our appreciation? Our kids stole their money!" About that time, Ms. Jones noticed Gayle and her students kneeling down and talking to Sarah and Jerry. She overheard Gayle telling Sarah and Jerry that she loved them, and she hoped they could come to their Bible Club.

Gayle called for me to come over. She said to Sarah, "Sarah would you show Pastor Tim what you just showed me?" The little girl raised her arm. She was wearing a sort sleeved shirt, so I could see a huge sore about an inch in diameter under her arm. The sore was swollen with red fluid oozing out of the middle. I cringed and felt a stinging sort of pain shoot through my body when I saw it. I asked Sarah what happened. She told me Jerry had one too. Jerry pulled the leg of his shorts up and showed me a sore on the back of his thigh. I asked Sarah, "How did you and Jerry get those sores?" "Momma got so mad at us last night. She said she was gonna teach us a lesson, so she put a fork on the stove. We ain't never gonna do that again. We ain't never gonna do that!" I was supposed to be the missionary, but God had to send missionaries from hundreds of miles away to see what He saw.

The Lord was sending mission teams from churches all over the country and what began as a one-week VBS became multiple weeks of Bible clubs during the spring and summer in several different locations scattered throughout the community. Mission team members were walking every street within a 1 ½ -mile radius of Brinkley Heights, picking up kids, bringing them to Bible club, and walking them home again after club was over. The enrollment grew to over 1,500 kids and 12 different locations. By the end of each summer we knew the location of every crack house, brothel, and gang hang out in the community. We also became aware of a disturbing reality. Children were living in crack houses and many children were roaming the streets. For these kids, drugs, gangs, crime, and violence were not just stories seen on the news. It was a way of life.

Amid all this activity, we learned that the church building was structurally unsound. A major portion of the building was determined to be too dangerous to occupy. I'll never forget the day we got the news we had to chain and padlock the sanctuary door. It was a Wednesday and the first member that showed up for the evening service smiled when I told her the news. I was puzzled and thought perhaps she did not understand but then she said, "Isn't it going to be amazing to see what the Lord is going to do next?"

We thought about looking for space in other area churches, but the congregation didn't want to leave their neighborhood, so we borrowed a revival tent from our local association of churches. We were in the tent for a year while we raised the money to tear down the old building. Interestingly, the church continued to grow while we were meeting in the tent. Brinkley Heights finally had to move into space at another local church while the old building was being demolished because the city would not allow us to stay on the property during the demolition process. The ministries were also moved to various other locations, but the plan was to one day return to the original church location.

June 12, 2002 started off as a normal day, but would become a crucial day in the ministry of Brinkley Heights. It was the third day of our Street Reach summer outreach ministry so volunteer mission teams were running Bible clubs for children in several locations. About 2:30 that afternoon I decided to check on one of the Bible club locations. Everything seemed to be great when a teenage girl came running out of her house next door to the lot where the Bible club was being held. She yelled to me that something terrible had happened and that a breaking news story was on the television in her house.

I ran into her house and when I saw what was on the television my heart dropped! A local news helicopter was videoing a crime scene. I knew the house they were focusing on very well because several children we had been reaching lived there. It was a drug house located about three blocks from where the little church used to be. Police cars were lined up all the way down one side of the street and ambulances were lined up all the way down the other side of the street. The news reporter said that there had been a terrible shooting at this house. Several people had been shot and some of them were children.

I drove as fast as I could to Le Bonheur Children's Hospital in downtown Memphis. They took me immediately to a family waiting room. When I walked in, one of the mothers of the children was hysterical and screamed, "Cindy has been shot!" I couldn't believe it! Cindy was only three years old! She told me Cindy was in surgery and the doctors were trying to save her, but the other children had been taken to the trauma unit which was located right across the street.

I ran across the street, but instead of taking me to a family waiting room, the staff took me directly into the trauma unit. It was a heart-rending scene with shooting victims everywhere like a war zone from some other country. It was surreal!

I was in shock and couldn't believe what I was seeing! This couldn't be happening! I looked across the room and saw four more children on gurneys. One of them, Lucy, motioned for me to come to her. I had no idea what to say to her. At that point I wasn't sure who had been shot, who was dead, or who was alive. All I knew was that Lucy was motioning for me to come to her. I found out later that the shooting was over a ten-dollar bag of weed. Three men drove up in front of the house and began shooting. They then went into the house, shooting everyone inside. Nine people were shot, five of them were children.

I will never forget walking up to Lucy. She was heavily bandaged. She wasn't crying but I could see the tears dried on her face. She looked up at me with her big brown eyes and said, "Pastor Tim, guess what? I was at the block party last night." I had forgotten all about the block party. We had a summer block party for the neighborhood kids with inflatables, a dunk tank, cotton candy and snow-cones. Hundreds of kids were there. She said, "And guess what happened? I asked Jesus to come into my heart." It was like Jesus was standing right there! I felt his presence and I heard him say to my heart, "Fight for my children!"

About 7:30 that night, while the surgeons were still working feverishly trying to save little Cindy's life, Jesus took her in his arms and took her home to be with Him in heaven.

That day changed everything! We had been involved in many outreach ministries, but that day we realized we were in a war. This war was more real than any physical war this world has ever seen. We were in a war for the lives and souls of the children and families that would have eternal significance. It took me back to that cold winter night in that broken-down little church building so many years before. Those young believers huddled together at the altar asking their heavenly father to send them supplies so they could reclaim their community for Jesus! The Lord had answered their prayers. They were on the front lines fighting for souls.

After the shooting, we prayed and fasted, asking the Lord what he wanted us to do. We knew we were still losing so many of our children and families to the streets. Families were being held captive and were being decimated by every kind of wickedness. Children were growing up in cesspools of immorality. We knew the Lord wanted us to rescue them and to deliver them from the hand of the wicked and, because of Street Reach Bible clubs, we knew where every stronghold of Satan was located. We knew the location of every drug house, crack house, gang house, and brothel.

We also knew that children were living in many of those places – just like Cindy, Lucy, and the other children who were shot that day. The Lord told us to go get them, so we decided to start a mission school for children living in the highest risk situations. We moved back to our side of the community to the old church site on Rosamond Avenue and, we began to draw plans for a school and community center. There was nothing there except a vacant lot, but we had been in a tent before, so we

asked if we could borrow it again. Just like years before, we had nothing, but we really had everything! We had God's Word, we had His Spirit, we had His people, and we had the privilege and power of prayer! *"The weapons of our warfare are not of this world but are divinely powerful for the destruction of strongholds."*

I was speaking at a church in Paris, Tennessee, and shared the vision of starting a school for kids living in drug houses. After the service a lady told me that her son was a principal at a school just like the one I described. It was called the Denver Street School and was a part of an organization that helped ministries start schools for high risk urban children called the National Association of Street Schools. I contacted them, and they agreed to help us begin organizing the school even though we didn't have a building! In October 2003 we held a ground-breaking ceremony for the new school and community center.

It was funny because we didn't have any money to build the building, but it didn't cost anything to have a ground breaking. I shared the vision for the school at our annual volunteer appreciation banquet. One of the attendees told me that he was a member of a volunteer organization that builds buildings for churches. It was called Carpenter's for Christ and was located in Talladega, Alabama. I contacted the president of the organization, but he told me their organization only built one project each summer and they already had a project for the summer of 2004. In fact, they already had projects lined up for the next four years.

In January 2004, the president of the Carpenters for Christ called me and asked if I was sitting down. He said the project for 2004 had canceled so he contacted each of the other projects that were scheduled, and they all said they could not be ready by summer. He then asked if we could be ready to build by summer. I said, "Of course!" I then asked him what we needed to do to be ready! He laughed and said I needed to send him a certified set of plans and the general contractor's contact information. He said his project leadership team would arrive in two weeks to look over the site and make sure our financing was in place to purchase all the materials for the project.

I remember thinking, "Is that all?" We had building plans, but we did not have a general contractor and we didn't have any money. I got on the phone and quickly found out that no general contractor was going to take on a volunteer project due to major liability concerns. On top of that, city code enforcement would also be a major obstacle for this type of project. The CFC volunteers wanted to build the 10,000 sq. ft. building in a 10-day period. That would be impossible! And what about the money? We would need over \$600,000 for materials and we had a grand total of "0"!

I called a friend who was a general contractor and asked him to meet me at the Rosamond site. We sat in his truck across from the empty field and I described to him what the Lord had put on our hearts to do. I told him about the Carpenter's for Christ and that I had been told we were not going to find a contractor that would

be willing to do a volunteer project like ours. He said, “Whoever told you that was wrong. I would be honored to be your general contractor.”

Two weeks later the CFC team arrived. We asked every person we knew who had construction, financial, or code enforcement connections to meet with the team. Right off the bat, the team asked about the finances for materials. It didn't take long for me to explain that we didn't have any money, but our Father does. Several others spoke up on behalf of Brinkley Heights and assured them that the money would be raised, and the materials would be on site when their volunteers arrived.

The team then asked about code enforcement and one of the men at the meeting was with Memphis code enforcement. He assured the team that code enforcement would work out a special schedule that would allow for work to continue without interruption. The CFC team worshiped with us Sunday morning before heading back to Talladega and told us they would get back to us in a few days. Later that afternoon, the CFC president called me and said that they had already made their decision. They were coming to Memphis!

The next 5 months were a blur, but in the summer of 2004, exactly 2 years after Cindy's death, the Lord sent 150 construction volunteers from 17 states to build a 10,000 sq. ft. school and community center in just 10 days! It was like Extreme Home Makeover on steroids! How did we raise the money? All I can say is that our Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He owns the city too!

In September 2004, we started Brinkley Heights Urban Academy with 13 Pre-K and Kindergarten students. We have added a grade each year. In the summer of 2008, the Carpenters for Christ returned to build an additional 20,000 sq. ft. building. BHUA now has 105 students enrolled in Pre-K through the 12th grade. In May of 2017, we witnessed the first graduates of Brinkley Heights Urban Academy walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. The 2017 BHUA Graduating Class of 2 students was a featured story on the front page of the May 16, 2017, edition of the Commercial Appeal, “Memphis school's 2-student graduating class highlights community's faith, love.” (<https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/news/columnists/david-waters/2017/05/16/memphis-schools-2-student-graduating-class-highlights-communitys-faith-love/317541001/>) Cindy would have been in the Graduating Class of 2017.