

THE ASCENT™

sponsored by



Jacob's Ladder™

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Come Up Higher...



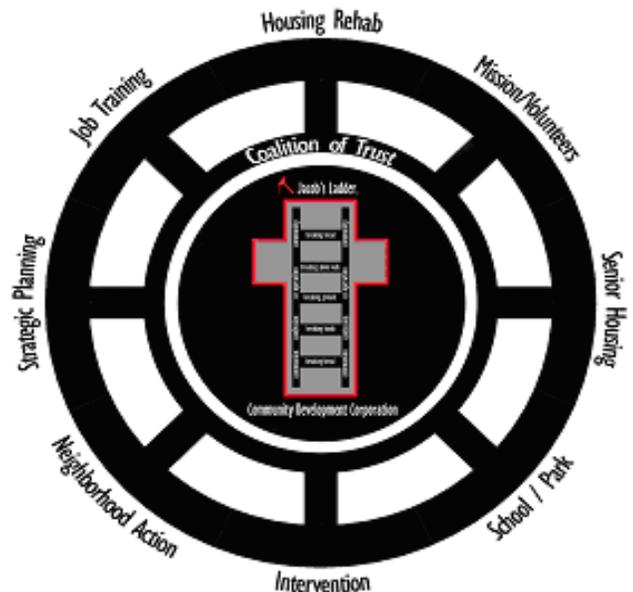
"Jacob dreamt that he saw a ladder, which rested on the ground with its top reaching to heaven, and angels of God were going up and down upon it. The Lord was standing beside him." Genesis 28:12

Dear Friends:

When I reflect on the story of Jacob's dream, I am reminded that the Lord has also been standing beside "us" as we minister like the angels to brokenness and need in the mission of Jacob's Ladder™. And it is in *His* name that I am writing to you to reflect upon our ministry efforts this past year and offer you an opportunity join the "angel band" in your sacrificial giving during this Christmas season.

Four and one-half years ago Jacob's Ladder™ began faithfully pursuing the holistic revitalization of one of our city's most neglected communities - the "Beltline." Shootings and killings, gangs and prostitution were the three problems most often complained about by the neighborhood citizens. An outsider might add three more to the list: eyesore lots, vacant houses, and lack of economic and educational opportunities. Somehow they all fit together, and in this case, the sum is indeed greater than the parts, because each feeds on and multiplies the effects of the other, whipping it into a "perfect storm." For years, outside communities tried to erect containment walls

around the Beltline, but that strategy proved to be more of a temporary band-aid than a permanent cure. So Jacob's Ladder™ developed an entirely new kind of vision to re-image the community which required us to build a "Coalition of Trust" by connecting the resources of local residents, business and churches. The model for our ministry in the Beltline resembles a wheel with the Jacob's Ladder™ program and the "Coalition of Trust" serving as its hub.



The hub of the wheel became the birthplace for a host of life-giving ministries, with each spoke of the wheel, fueled by a "Coalition of Trust," denoting a different opportunity to serve.

The top spoke is *Housing Rehab*, signifying housing infrastructure - transforming vacant, boarded-

up buildings into decent affordable homes for qualified families. In 2008, with the help of 100+ volunteers, we did major repairs on ten homes, finished reconstructing four more, and also worked on our first church. (See photos below) One of our home buyers shed her addiction to alcohol with the help of the Salvation Army, got a job and moved her family out of the shelter into one of our homes almost 2 years ago.



Mural painted by Sunbury U.M.C. Volunteers



Catholic Heart Mission Group Volunteers helped to renovate an older home in the Beltline community as well as remove a demolished house which had been resting on the slab above.

We have also begun transforming vacant lots. These cleared lots will be the future sites for new homes. We have even established a *community garden* where children and adults can learn to plant, tend, grow and use the fresh produce.

The opposing spoke to *Housing Rehab* on the model for ministry wheel is: *Intervention*, that is education and crisis intervention for at-risk youth exposed to gangs and violence. In March 2008, with the help of a lot of friends and financial assistance, the Beltline Youth Enrichment Center began offering sanctuary, after-school tutoring and free classes in art, music, theater, wood-working and computer skills to the community's children. Students from CBHS and the University of Memphis, plus retired City of Memphis school teachers make-up part of our terrific volunteer staff. We have been blessed with resources "flowing up and down the ladder."



Grand Opening of The Beltline Youth Enrichment Center

As 2008 comes to a close, we at Jacob's Ladder™ are looking to begin the implementation of the remaining spokes of our model for ministry in the coming years. As we continue to renovate housing, we hope in the near future to add a neighborhood thrift store providing clothing, household goods, and furniture. We are also planning to use this space as a community gathering place that would possibly house a health clinic. The store would be operated by a consortium of Beltline community church volunteers. In addition, we are working with the city to expand our housing program and advocating for a job training center, a school, a park, and a senior housing complex. A few years ago none of these ideas seemed feasible, but Fairgrounds redevelopment has greatly accelerated the possibilities.

Community building from a faith-based perspective takes financial resources. As you reflect on your year-end giving, we ask you to be one of the "angels" in Jacob's dream, moving up and down the ladder bearing gifts.

The Grace and Peace of Christ be With You,
Rev. William D. Marler, Executive Director