

A Personal Word for You

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Academy multiplies the miracles

If you ever need a solid dose of hope when you feel a creeping grayness beginning to shadow your outlook on life, I have the source! Go to the Adult Renewal Academy and just soak up the stuff of miracles. The end of the fall semester at the ARA was celebrated with an annual Christmas Party and I wish you could have been there.

The whole idea of the ARA is to take the possibilities of education and to put them smack dab into the middle of some of our most disenfranchised neighborhoods so that the residents can have a chance to access the whole world of knowledge. Our Friendship Houses become the places where dreams can come true for scores of lives, both young and old, whose journeys through life have been shunted onto many side rails with the same dead end.

Imagine that you were a young girl so bright that endless potential flamed before you. Then you make a mistake and have to drop out of school. Think that you were a young man who got beat up so many times in a drug-hazed home that you lost all hope for your future. Now you join with others in that ditch of a life that sits on a porch and “hangs” day in and day out. You may feel that you are dying of old age at 19.

At Christmas time, I saw what all of our teachers, partners and helpers see every day at the Friendship House’s Adult Renewal Academy. I saw a common ordinary driveway transformed before my eyes into a highway.

A highway of hope!

I saw women young and old walking up the driveway from their homes in the neighborhood to go to “school.” I saw young men (there are 26 young men from 17 to 24 years of age in the ARA) with all of their “stuff” on but with trousers pulled up as high as their new found self-esteem. Over 50 folks now walk into the Academy. They are met with Bible study devotions, life skills training, and GED course work each day. But most of all, they are met with a host of “friends” who come from all over the city, even the wealthiest parts, to be with them on their journey.

I wish you could have been there for the party and the semester ending ceremony! To see a driveway changed into a highway is something else. But to see a life changed from despair to hope is the greatest miracle of all. I saw what our Friendship house folks see every day. I don’t know how many “perfect attendance awards” were handed out. But it was so many that I was dumbfounded. Did I see right? Thirteen of our Academy took a college course on computers taught at the St. Catherin Community Center, not far from where a riot lasted three days in the late 1980s. All 13 of the students made an “A.”

My teacher was right. The greatest miracle in the universe is a changed life. Soon we will see the Adult Renewal Academy in all five neighborhoods we currently serve. We will expand from Cedar Grove and the Barksdale Annex to Queensborough, Allendale, and Highland. By the end of this decade we are projecting the construction of many more Friendship Houses. And this is the way we plan to multiply the miracles around us!

In 10 years time, when the results are recited in the ceremonies and the certificates of so many lives that have walked up those driveways of the Friendship Houses, we will not have to say, "I wish you could have been there." Because you are there!

Your prayers, your words of encouragement, your volunteer hours, the checks of support you give, and the contagion of your hope for a new world filled with multiplying miracles makes you present at the creation of a climate of light so powerful that no darkness shall win. God bless you and thank you for your partnership!