



"Follow Jesus, Make Disciples, and Transform the World."

Mission of the United Methodist Church

It sounds easy, doesn't it? But as 12 members of DUMC are learning, transforming the world can be also be a transformational experience for them as well.

It's powerful stuff - being witness to this latter type of transformation - and it's going on every other Wednesday night on the second floor of the Alexander Education Building. Come by and feel the buzz of it happening! That's when 12 of your fellow DUMC members join their Bridge Builder teammates as mentors to sort through the "mechanics" of rising within a system many have never fully understood. Most of us, however, somehow know the system inherently and have no idea how hard it is for those who don't to navigate its confusing and challenging path.



Attending 6 weeks of DUMC's Bridges Out of Poverty course, having patience, and remembering to try to see team members as God sees them is all it takes to be a Bridge Builders mentor. It can be a slow process. You won't look back, though, once you've made the connection and begin to care about the people on your team.

"Mentoring has opened my eyes to the challenges faced by the working poor," says Jay Casey, a DUMC member who mentors one of the Bridge Builder teams. "Their resourcefulness in dealing with an unforgiving economy and consumer culture has impressed me. And their vulnerability has humbled me about the comfort and security that surrounds my own life."

Casey joins BJ Butler, Bonni Morrell, Beth Quinn, Debbie Kolarik, Joe Forti, Nancy Sinclair, Bud Younts, Rebecca Rosensweig, Doug Martin, Diane Myers, and Sharon Zogg in this journey to walk along side 10 women in our community who are motivated and looking for a hand UP to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

DUMC's Alexis Coleman, Pastor of Missions and a certified trainer in [Bridges Out of Poverty](#), brought the program to our church two and a half years ago. Member Julie Johnson has since also been trained and certified to lead.



DUMC's program has 2 components, says Johnson. "The first is called Foundations, a 16- week course for 10-12 participants currently living in high instability, but ready to work to break that cycle. They are referred to our program by their case managers in agencies supported by the church - Ada Jenkins, Our Towns Habitat, Davidson Housing Coalition, and Hope House. We also send flyers home through participants in DUMC's Backpack Ministry. The goal of the Foundations course is to help participants understand why they are living from one crisis to the next, and help them begin to create a future story of greater stability for themselves. The outcome? They develop a set of SMART [specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely] goals they use to work on over the next 1-2 years."

"Part two is Bridge Builders, a 40-week program for graduates of Foundations to refine and work on their SMART goals in small teams with other Foundations grads and mentors from the church who have completed the Bridges Out of Poverty training. Mentors' roles are to be sounding boards, encouragers, and facilitators for meeting graduates' goals one at a time. Alternating weeks, graduates participate in 20 weeks of training designed to help them continue to build their resources in financial and life skills. The desired outcome is to help participants begin to create more stability and gain access to more permanent housing, better paying jobs, access to health care other than Medicaid, more reliable transportation, and fewer visits to food pantries and soup kitchens," Johnson adds.

"We are on our third Getting Ahead class, which should graduate 8 participants in March 2018," she explains. "We've already graduated 2 classes (9 participants in 2016 and 10 in 2017). All but one of the participants have been female. Most are single mothers. They are all ages and have been white, black, or Hispanic."

Participants and their children join DUMC's Wonderful Wednesday Dinners when it is operating. The church provides childcare while their mothers are in class. So far, we've had contact with 46 children. When Wonderful Wednesdays isn't operating, church groups volunteer to cater meals for the participants. The church also offers transportation support in the form of gas cards to participants and a stipend for attending classes, which can be used to pay a bill, like rent or utilities.

DUMC's first Bridge Builders started this past September and will run through June. There are 10 Foundations graduates and 12 mentors from the church - forming 3 teams.

Person-to-person relationships. Most new, innovative, and sustainable helping ministries promote this age-old form of transforming the lives of those in poverty and crisis as the best way to create bonds that produce opportunities for giving the proverbial "hand-up" instead of "hand-out." And it's going on now at DUMC.



How can you help?

- Enroll in the next Bridges out of Poverty class to become a Bridge Builders mentor. As more participants graduate from Foundations and our Bridge Builder teams grow, we will need more and more mentors. The next class is scheduled for Sundays March 11, 18, and 25 from 8:45 - 10:45 a.m.
- Encourage your small group to volunteer to provide dinner for participants and their children (usually 20 - 25 people) on evenings when Wonderful Wednesday Dinners aren't available.
- Donate gas cards (\$25 or less) to the program for participants.
- Volunteer to "hang out" with the teenage children who come with their mothers.
- Volunteer to translate for our Spanish speakers.
- Pray for this unique program and the life-changing opportunities it provides both participants and mentors.

Questions? Contact [Rev. Alexis Coleman](#) (704-892-8277).

Written by BJ Butler
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