

Habitat for Humanity Outreach



Presented 5/3/2015 by Barb Pickett

The UUAA Habitat for Humanity community outreach began in the year 2000 when two members of our congregation were inspired by the good work being done by Habitat for Humanity building homes for low income families all over the world. Dorothy Wilson talked to a fellow congregant who returned enthused from a Habitat for Humanity trip to the Philippines where she worked with Jimmy Carter; Kathy Friedrichs returned energized from a very successful H4H build in Brazil coordinated by her husband Dave. Dorothy and Kathy contacted the local Habitat for Humanity Huron Valley office to see how to start a group in our congregation. They were asked if our congregation would join a group called The Good News House, which was at that time a group of local Methodist churches who were building Habitat houses in the Ann Arbor –Ypsilanti area.

Dorothy and Kathy joined the Good News House Steering Committee and in the spring of 2000 committed our congregation to raise \$4000 for building supplies and to provide volunteers to help with all phases of building a house for a local family. Dorothy and Kathy asked Bev Todd for help and in the summer of 2000 set up a table in the social hall and began recruiting contributions and volunteers. To their great pleasure the UUs raised even more than their promised \$4000 and contributed more volunteers than any other church that first year.

When UUAA joined the Good News House Group[, Habitat was building houses from the ground up. Many times we had to clean an empty lot before the bulldozer could begin digging the basement and foundation. In 2008, when the housing market was struggling so badly, Habitat for Humanity Huron Valley made the decision to save existing houses. They began to buy foreclosed homes. We could rebuild and renovate two homes for the same cost and sometimes less than building a new house. Each foreclosed house is given a complete makeover which usually means replacing the furnace and plumbing, maybe a new roof, possibly new walls. All kitchens are upgraded with a new stove and refrigerator. When the work is done, the neglected, sad house is an energy efficient, clean and bright home waiting for its new owner to move into it.

Many faithful volunteers have participated over the past 15 years, donating money, making lunches, hanging drywall, planting and mowing, installing insulation and siding and roofing, painting digging or sometimes just sweeping up after everybody. Some highlights include a Ladies Day in 2002, where only women volunteers could work and the UUAA provided a licensed builder for the day, Kathy Alawi. In 2009, our then fairly new minister, Rev Gail R. Geisenhainer, performed the house blessing for an Islamic family. In 2013, the UUAA won an award for having the most volunteers of the 17 churches participating in the Good News House group. This year we celebrate as a new member of our congregation, Angela Peters, gets ready to move into her home in Ypsilanti. She is the first UU we know of to buy a Good News home and the second member of a Good News congregation to buy a Good News home.

Currently there are 17 participating churches in the GNH group—Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Nazarenes and of course UUs. The UU Habitat committee, Mike Muha, Michelle Lovasz, Fran Lyman, Angela Peters, Sandy Simon and myself, started meeting about a month ago so that we would be ready for today, the start of our 16th year as part of the Good News House group. We will start to raise our pledge of \$7000 toward building costs, sign up volunteers to both work on the site and to make lunches that we will provide on our work days. We will have a table in the social hall until August. We invite you to treat yourself to the great satisfaction that comes from literally lending your hands to this very hands on, very effective community outreach.

I would like to thank Dorothy Wilson and Kathy Friedrichs for sharing their recollections and Sandy Simon for her impeccable proof reading abilities. But most of all, I want to thank all of you for keeping this Habitat project alive and going for all these years.



2004 UU Team