

The Daily Herald.

Editorial

Saving Columbia: Making a difference, one house at a time

A caller to Sound Off, The Daily Herald's anonymous comment line, suggested recently that churches should pay for the medical treatment of uninsured citizens.

Reforming America's health care system is a job far too massive to be accomplished by any one segment of our society alone — even church congregations. But the caller's idea isn't without merit.

Individually and as denominations, churches already contribute to the nation's welfare on a massive scale. How much more might they achieve if they united for a common cause?

Here at home, we've seen how effective churches can be when they work together to attack social problems. An excellent example is The People's Table, a collaborative of about a dozen churches that feeds the homeless and poor twice a week.

We've also been shown a picture of what might be. Maury Hills Church of Christ recently launched a ministry called "People Helping People" that has paid for new roofs and other important repairs on the homes of two local families that were physically or financially unable to make the repairs themselves.

The program's vision, according to Maury Hills Minister Russ Adcox, is to partner with other churches and non-profit organizations to revitalize the community through home renovations — to "transform entire neighborhoods by renovating one house at a time."

The organizers of People Helping People plan to focus initially on the east side of Columbia and eventually spread out to other areas of the city and even the state.

It's a wildly ambitious goal. But it's not impossible. By tackling one home at a time, and recruiting one partner at a time, this group could rack up enough successes to inspire the rest of our community to get on board. They could start a movement.

Columbia needs just such a victory. Our economy is still on the ropes from the national recession, our local governments are running in the red and our unemployment is high. Things may get worse as the county's auto assembly plant — its biggest industry — is shuttered next month.

Many of our neighborhoods were already showing the strain of decades of neglect. A few are

simply slums.

In times such as these, people look for leaders to step up and give them some hope. To show them the way forward. To lead by example.

Our local churches could provide that leadership.

What if every church in Maury County agreed to “adopt” just a three-block radius around its property? What if church members volunteered their time and efforts to improve those neighborhoods, by collecting litter, painting dilapidated homes, mowing vacant lots or doing whatever is needed?

Those churches fortunate enough to be located in affluent areas could adopt another neighborhood or join People Helping People.

What might be the cumulative affect of all these efforts? Clean, attractive communities attract new residents, new businesses, new jobs.

Our churches, if they answered this challenge, could be the catalyst that turns Columbia’s fortunes around.

The Daily Herald would help generate support for this effort by sharing the stories of reclamation and rejuvenation with our readers.

Historically churches have been a lighthouse for the community, helping citizens navigate their way through waters both rocky and smooth.

Can our churches pull off another miracle in Columbia?

<http://columbiadailyherald.com/articles/2009/10/11/opinion/01edit.txt>