



Withintrification: Transforming A Community From The Inside Out

Bible Center Church
Built Environment Report
1956 - 2024

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, in Homewood [here]
as it is in heaven [there]. Matthew 6:10 (ish)

#HereLikeThere

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LETTER FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

For almost 70 years, Bible Center Church has sought to positively impact the Homewood community. The things we have accomplished would not have been possible without the vision and foundation laid by our founders, the tireless efforts of our staff, and the generous support of our members and partners.

Over the years, we have picked up thousands of pounds of trash, cut down acres of weeds, created dozens of jobs, educated hundreds of children, purchased and revitalized thousands of square feet of vacant and abandoned residential and commercial property.

The purpose of this report is to reflect upon and celebrate the past, but also to serve as a call to action to continue the work.

We thank you for your support and encourage you to continue to partner with us to realize the vision to, “make earth more like heaven.”

John M. Wallace

MISSION AND VISION

Mission

Love God. Love People. Live Like Jesus.

Vision

Make Earth [here] More Like Heaven [there]

Executive Summary

The vision of Bible Center Church is, “to make earth more like heaven.” The inspiration for this vision comes from two Bible verses. The first is Matthew 6:10, a passage from what is often referred to as, “The Lord’s Prayer.” The verse reads, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth like it is in heaven.”

In our effort to make earth more like heaven, Bible Center educates young people, employs community residents, trains aspiring entrepreneurs, sweeps streets, picks up trash, revitalizes vacant and abandoned properties, and launches new enterprises, to benefit the children, families, and seniors, who live, learn, work, and worship in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh, PA.

(<https://www.biblecenterpgh.org/the-oasis-project>)

The second verse that motivates our vision is found in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 29:7, God instructs His people to, “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for this city, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

As a community-based faith community, Bible Center works and prays for the wellbeing of Homewood because we realize that our social, economic, cultural, and spiritual peace and prosperity is intimately tied to the neighborhood’s wellbeing.

In this report, we briefly review the history of Bible Center’s work to improve Homewood’s physical environment and to make our piece of earth [here], a little more like heaven [there].

BUYING BACK THE BLOCK

The early years (1956-1979)

Driving through Homewood in the mid-1950s, Elder Ralph Groce said he heard a cry for help coming from the neighborhood. In June 1956, he and his wife, Mother Bernice Groce, moved from Clairton, PA to Homewood to start a new faith community to respond to that cry. Since its founding, Bible Center has sought to positively impact the neighborhood through outreach programs, the adaptive reuse of existing properties, and the beautification of vacant land. The purpose of this work was, and continues to be, to demonstrate the love of God to the people who live, learn, work, and worship in Homewood.

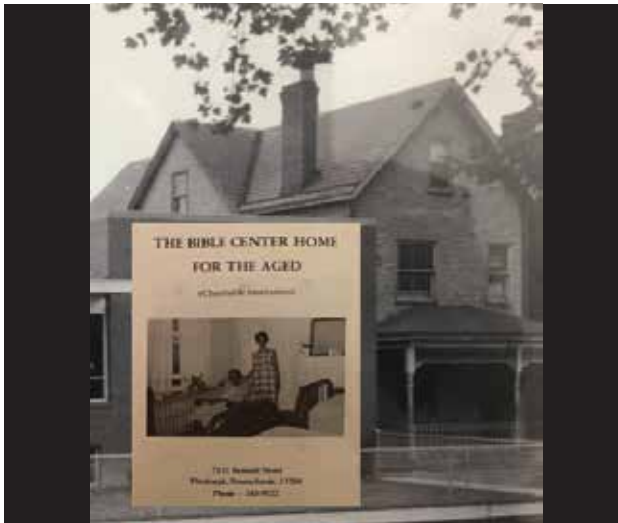


Bible Center Church was birthed in the adaptive reuse of a duplex located at 7214 Tioga Street in Homewood. The Groce's lived on the second floor and transformed the first floor into the church's inaugural worship and education space.

In 1965, the congregation relocated from the Groce's home on Tioga Street to its second adaptive reuse project—a large three-story single-family residence at 7236 Bennett Street. Bible Center



transformed the house into a space for worship services on the first floor, a kitchen and fellowship hall in the basement, and an office and classroom on the second and third floors in the house's former bedrooms. In addition to Sunday morning worship services, and Sunday and mid-week Bible studies, the building supported community outreach, leadership development, and summer programs for children.



Between 1967 and 1971, Bible Center launched its first social enterprise—the Bible Center Home for the Aged. The ministry was located at 7132 Bennett Street. The purpose of the Home was to provide a caring family environment for seniors, including those with intellectual disabilities. Unfortunately, Bible Center was unable to afford a second-floor fire escape required by the city, so the Home was forced to close.

Despite the closing of the Home for the Aged, the Groces sought to continue the work through the development of a 100-unit apartment building for the elderly and the indigent, as described in an article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, published in December of 1972. Although the plan for the apartment building never came to fruition, the Groces continued their commitment to serving the elderly, moving several of the residents from the

Home for the Aged, into their own residence, after the Home closed.

Throughout the 1970s, Bible Center began to purchase vacant properties and land around its 7236 Bennett Street facility, with a vision to expand and perhaps one day build a new edifice. In the late 1970s, Bible Center acquired a small mortgage, extended its existing building, and added an outdoor baptism pool. The church retired the mortgage quickly and the congregation grew into its renovated new space.

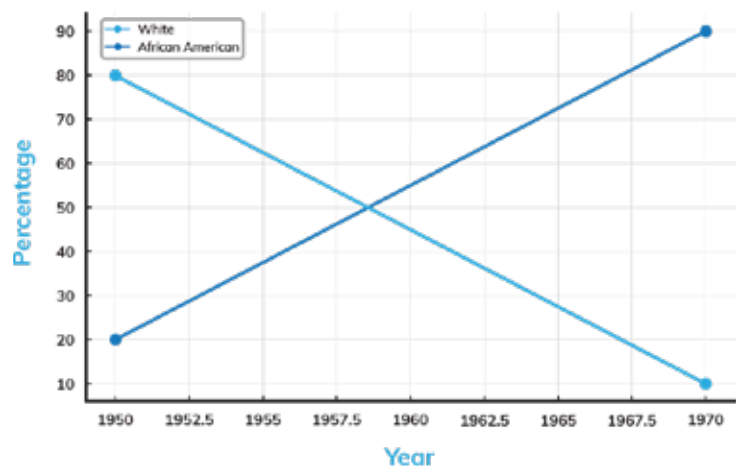


Responding to Closing Steel Mills, Crack Cocaine, and Neighborhood Decline (1980 - 2003)

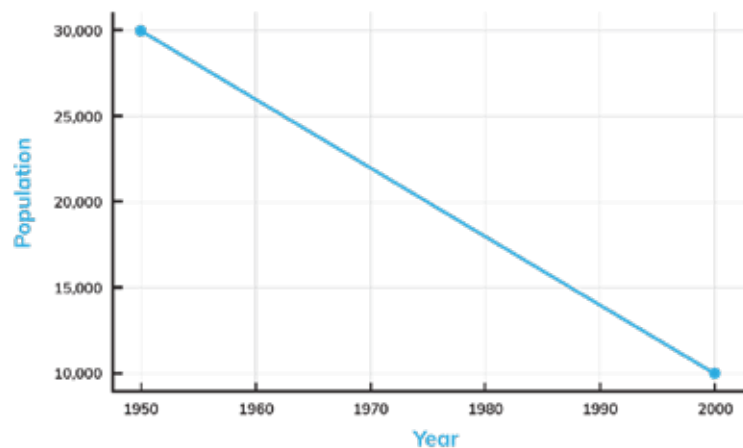
Because of significant changes in the economy between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, demand for steel decreased, production costs increased, and Pittsburgh lost over 150,000 jobs as many of its steel mills closed. After the closure of the mills, Pittsburgh's economy collapsed, the region experienced high rates of unemployment, and many of the city's residents moved to other parts of the country.

Consistent with a city-wide population decline that had begun in the 1950s, Homewood's population plummeted from more than 30,000 residents in 1950 to approximately 9,000 by the early 2000s. As a result of the closing of the mills, White flight to the suburbs, and the displacement of thousands of African Americans caused by the demolition of the lower Hill District, Homewood's demographics shifted dramatically. In fact, between 1950 and 1970, Homewood changed from being working and middle class and approximately 80% white, to more than 90% African American and, disproportionately, economically disadvantaged.

Demographic Shift In Homewood (1950 To 1970)



Homewood Population Decline (1950 To Early 2000s)



Beginning in the mid-1980s, Homewood, like many other low-income communities across the nation, experienced a significant rise in the use and distribution of crack cocaine, a highly addictive form of cocaine sold in small, affordable quantities, accessible to a broad segment of Pittsburgh's socially and economically distressed Black population. Through the 1980s and early 1990s, the influx of crack cocaine, and the associated drug trade, led to an explosion of crime and violence as gangs competed for control of the crack trade.

Segments of Homewood, where the violence was particularly severe, became known as the “killing fields.” The so-called “killing fields” were concentrated in the blocks around Bible Center, in particular in the alleyways (i.e., Formosa Way and Fleury Way) bounded by Sterrett and Collier Streets. The twin epidemics of violence and drug addiction ravaged the neighborhood and adversely impacted every aspect of the community, including families, schools, businesses, and churches.



'The killing fields' demolished in Homewood

rtmadmimgpc
April 11, 2012



These epidemics also prompted a strong response from law enforcement that resulted in high incarceration rates, particularly for young Black men, further population decline, and significant growth in the number of vacant and abandoned residential and commercial

properties in the neighborhood more generally, and around Bible Center in particular.

In the early 2000s Homewood's population continued to decline, more businesses closed, homeowners left, vacancy and tax delinquency skyrocketed, and significant amounts of property ended up owned, not by Homewood residents, but by the city of Pittsburgh, or in the hands of individual and commercial landlords, many of whom did not even live in the state of Pennsylvania.

Homewood Property Ownership, 2009



Withintrification: Changing the Community from the Inside Out (2004 - Present)

During the preceding decades, the Bible Center congregation, like the Homewood community, began to decline in numbers. In 2003, one of Bible Center's founders, Elder Ralph Groce passed. In 2004, Elder Groce's grandson, John Wallace, his wife, Cynthia Wallace, and their four children, moved to Pittsburgh, to lead the church, which had dwindled to 13 members—12 adults and 1 teenager.

Before moving back to Pittsburgh, Dr. John Wallace was a professor at the University of Michigan, a researcher and teacher of what he called, Holistic Faith-Based Development. Dr. Wallace's research and writing on Holistic Faith-Based Development provided a blueprint for congregations' role in the development and revitalization of low-income urban neighborhoods, described by a term he coined—withintrification.

In contrast to gentrification—the process by which wealthier individuals from outside a community purchase, rehabilitate, and occupy properties, increase property values, and ultimately displace former residents—withintrification begins from within a

community, driven by its members and leaders, to benefit existing residents.

Withintrification leverages the investment of the community's resources, builds upon its existing human, social, and physical assets, and seeks to preserve the community's cultural heritage and history for the people who currently live there.

Key goals of withintrification are to beautify the neighborhood, support local employment, increase home ownership, launch new businesses, and create generational wealth. In addition to the community's assets, withintrification leaders selectively identify and seek to attract outside resources and investors who will benefit, but not exploit the community, to improve quality of life, promote flourishing, and minimize displacement.

Like his grandfather, John Wallace, felt called to Homewood, returning to the neighborhood and the church in which he was born, to serve. With a small congregation, a research-based blueprint, and faith in God, the Bible Center Church family had t-shirts printed that said on

one side, “Bible Center Loves Homewood,” and on the other, “The Church Has Left the Building.” With its physical, knowledge, and human assets in hand, Bible Center launched its mission to “withintrify” its piece of Homewood, to make it more like heaven.



Withintrification not Gentrification



The Roundtable
on Religion and Social Welfare Policy

Holistic Faith-Based Development

Toward a Conceptual Framework

**Bible Center
s
Homewood**

**The church
has left
the building.**

*Gone
Outreaching!*

Starting in 2004, the congregation began to grow, and Bible Center began to create what has become their multi-facility church campus. The work began as Bible Center remodeled their primary worship, fellowship, and education space at 7236 Bennett Street, and continued to purchase vacant and abandoned properties contiguous to the building. The congregation, including its youth, also began to reach out to the community through door knocking, community cookouts, food and clothing giveaways, and launched a “green and clean” campaign, to pick up trash, mow grass, cut down weeds, board up and beautify vacant properties, and beautify the blocks surrounding their building.



Fleury Way: The Triplex, Oasis Farm and Fishery, the Field, and the Playground

In the mid-2000s, Bible Center initiated its next adaptive reuse project, the purchase and renovation of a three-unit rowhouse located at 7238, 7238 ½, 7240 Fleury Way, now referred to as the Triplex. The Triplex, located immediately across the alley from the 7236 Bennett Street building, was being actively used as a crack house and was surrounded by numerous other vacant buildings and lots when Bible Center purchased it.

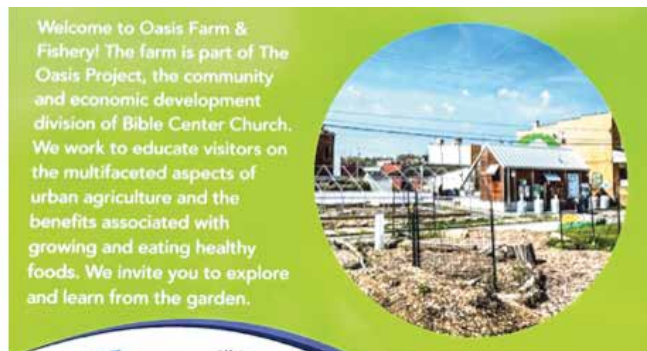
The Triplex was renovated and eventually came to house Bible Center's administrative offices, classrooms, and meeting spaces for youth and community activities, and eventually the offices of its educational programs delivered through The Oasis Project—the community and economic development division of Bible Center, officially launched in 2013.



Over time, Bible Center has purchased most of the properties surrounding the Triplex, on both sides of Fleury Way (i.e., the “killing fields”). Today, these lots have been cleaned, cleared, and transformed into three distinct yet interrelated projects: an urban farm—Oasis Farm and Fishery, a large greenspace used for outdoor education and recreation, and a widely used community playground for Homewood’s children. Together they are an inviting and dynamic Outdoor Learning Campus.

Oasis Farm and Fishery is an educational urban farm developed in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh’s Business of Humanities Project and with additional support from Chatham University’s Falk School of Sustainability & Environment. The farm teaches young people and community residents various methods to grow fresh produce, as well as, the medicinal uses and history of numerous plants, including some brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans.

The farm includes a solar-powered greenhouse, two solar arrays, an outdoor kitchen and pizza oven, a hoop house, several raised beds, and a park with various fruits, nuts, and other edible plants. The produce from the farm is shared with the community at the Homewood Farmers Market (June through October) and used at Bible Center’s community “third” space, Everyday Café (described more fully later in the report).



In 2009, Bible Center demolished 7236 Bennett Street—the house that had served as its home since 1965, relocated its worship services to Pittsburgh Public School’s Westinghouse 6-12, and expanded the greenspace to create an outdoor recreational field for Bible Center’s annual summer programs, Mega Sports Camp, and The Maker’s Clubhouse Green STEAM and Play 7-week summer camp mentioned above.

As a child-focused recreational complement to the field, in 2013, Bible Center partnered with Homewood residents and their children, Homewood Children’s Village, and the Heinz Endowments to design and install a Kaboom™ playground on a vacant lot owned by Bible Center. More recently (i.e., in 2024), Bible Center expanded the playground and installed a new set of playground equipment designed explicitly for preschool-aged children.



The Ministry House: Don't Sell Grandma's House!

When Mother Groce passed in 2008, she left her house, and Bible Center's birthplace—7214 Tioga Street, to the church. The house became Bible Center's next adaptive reuse project. The work of the house launched, focused on the educational, social, and spiritual development of young people, a priority that has always been one of Bible Center's core values, rooted in the Groce's leadership of the youth department of their church in Clairton, PA, before they moved to Homewood. The property was rezoned from single-family residential to multi-suite residential and renamed the "Ralph and Bernice Groce Ministry House."

Around 2009, a group of six young adults, most of whom were college students, became the residents of the Ministry House. Together, these young people launched Bible Center's first educational outreach program, The Maker's Clubhouse (TMC).



In 2011, TMC began as a two-day per-week after-school soccer and homework help program at Pittsburgh Public Schools' Faison K-5, about two blocks from the Ministry House. Today, TMC has expanded to include a five-day per week, three-hour per day, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and math) focused academic program that serves 150 students at Faison and Lincoln Elementary Schools, and a seven-week, five-day per week, 6.5 hours per day summer program for over 100 students who live in and around Homewood.

Another property-related adaptive reuse project of Bible Center, its urban farm—Oasis Farm and Fishery (described more fully above), also has its roots in the work of the residents of the Ministry House. The house's residents created the prototype for the farm by reviving the small greenhouse Elder Groce had built in the rear of his home, growing seedlings and planting them in the lot beside the house, in what had been his garden, decades before.



The Worship, Arts, Recreation, and Ministry (WARM) Center, Oasis Community Kitchen, and The Maker's Clubhouse Early Learning Center

In 2012 Bible Center purchased the former Homewood Rite Aid Retail Pharmacy building from Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority. The building was originally designed as a two-story mini-mall, with the Rite Aid Pharmacy serving as the anchor tenant on the upper level, with several individual spaces on the lower level intended for commercial use (e.g., retail or offices).

On November 8, 1995, Rite Aid's manager was kidnapped and killed as he tried to deposit the store's receipts in the local bank. As a result of the killing, the Rite Aid, located on the busiest corner in Homewood, was shuttered and its bullet-ridden windows and shattered glass doors, unfortunately shaped many people's perception of Homewood for nearly two decades



January 1, 2014, the Bible Center family relocated to the former Rite Aid and renamed the building the WARM—Worship, Arts, Recreation, and Ministry—Center. The WARM Center embodies Bible Center's theology and philosophy of real estate. Bible Center believes and models that "church" buildings, particularly in low-income communities of need, must be maximized as multi-use tools (like Swiss Army knives!) for community ministry. This belief is rooted in Biblical history and in African American history, where congregational buildings like synagogues and churches served as multi-use community centers for worship, education, social service delivery, shared meals and meetings, and other community purposes, not restricted to religious use.

Since moving into the WARM Center, Bible Center has completed the adaptive reuse of the building and has used it for myriad events and activities, in addition to weekly worship services. These activities include conferences on women's health and mental health, summer meals for low-income children, entrepreneurship classes, holiday pop-up malls for entrepreneurs, classrooms for university and seminary students to learn about faith-based economic development, concerts, plays, hands-on science centers for children to experience interactive STEAM education, and numerous other programs to serve and support the children, youth, families, and seniors of Homewood and beyond.



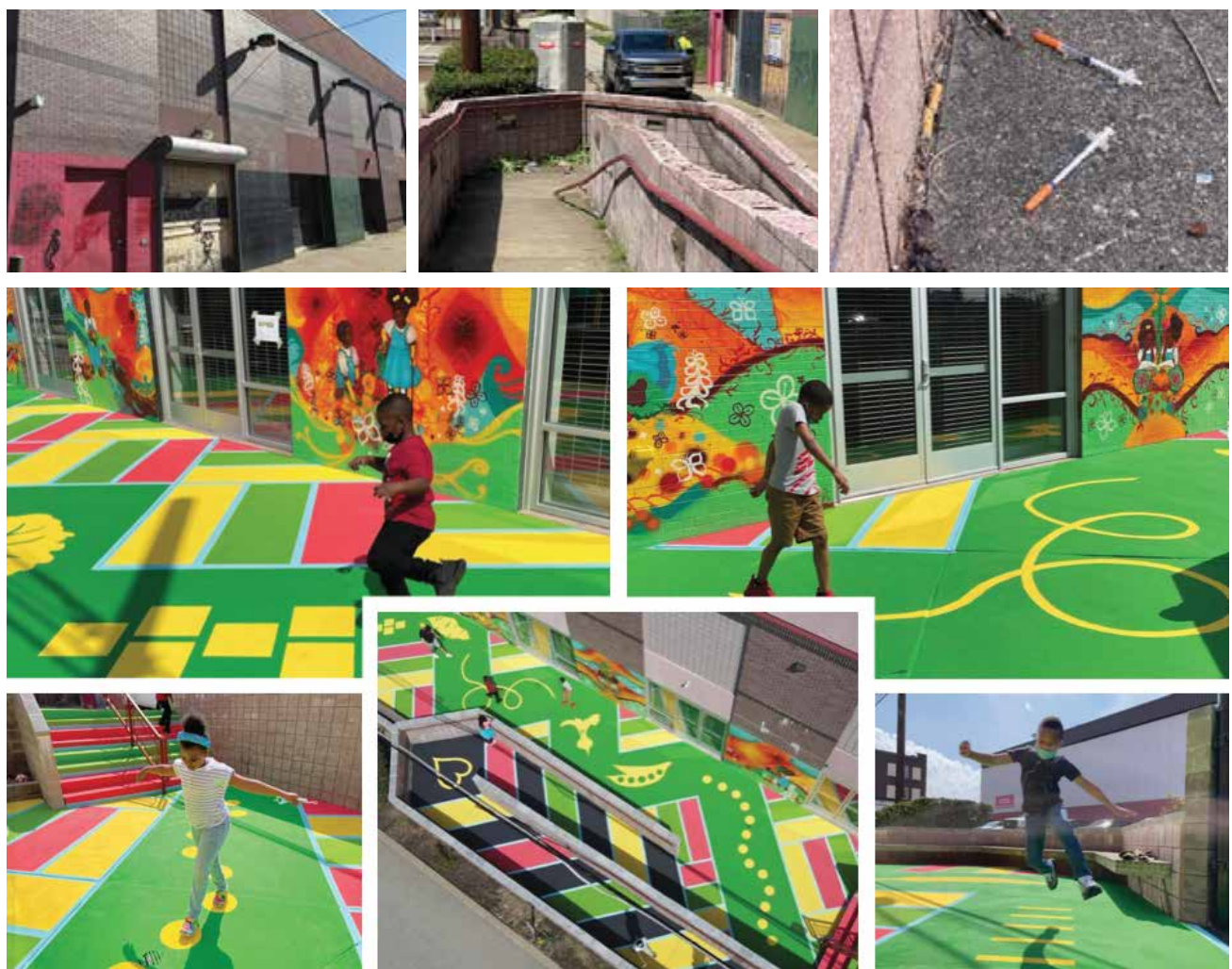
Some of the WARM Center's most memorable, and perhaps most impactful, community uses occurred in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, Bible Center transformed the WARM Center into a food distribution hub, delivering over 212,000 meals to needy children and families, and created what became a learning hub model for Allegheny County, called the Neighborhood SCHOOL—Strategy Created to Help Optimize Online Learning.

The Neighborhood SCHOOL educated 58 students, from roughly 13 different schools, every day, for the entire 2020-2021 academic year, and part of the 2021-2022 academic year. The SCHOOL enabled parents, most of whom were “necessary workers,” to continue to earn, while their children were provided resources, that many of their households lacked (e.g., new computer devices and high-speed internet), resources that enabled their children to learn and to socialize with their peers while many children who attempted to learn from home struggled academically and socially.



As the needs and aspirations of the community became clearer, and resources became available, the adaptive reuse of the former Rite Aid has included significant renovation of the outside of the building and the complete redevelopment of the lower level. Before Bible Center acquired the former Right Aid, the lower level had been used sporadically by several local not-for-profits to deliver social services and the area outside the building had, unfortunately, become an unsafe hub for illicit activity, and was littered with cigarette butts, beer cans, liquor bottles, and syringes.

Bible Center's renovation of the lower level began in the early 2020s. Today, the outside of the building has been transformed into a safe and vibrant play space for children, highlighted by a series of murals, including a beautiful ground mural, murals of children on the walls, and what has become an iconic mural on the rear of the building that proudly proclaims that "Homewood is Home."



Inside the lower level of the WARM Center, Bible Center has launched two new social enterprises to serve Homewood and beyond—Oasis Community Kitchen (OCK) and The Maker's Clubhouse Early Learning Center (TMC-ELC). Oasis Community Kitchen was founded in 2021 to help existing and aspiring food-based entrepreneurs launch and scale their businesses. The kitchen is a rentable, shared-use commercial kitchen equipped with convection ovens, a cooktop, a deep fryer, two large stoves, a dishwasher, a walk-in cooler, a standing mixer, and refrigerator and freezer space, along with a full set of commercial pots, pans, and utensils.

In 2023, Bible Center completed the renovation of the other half of the lower level of the WARM Center to house The Maker's Clubhouse Early Learning Center. TMC-ELC is a Montessori-inspired preschool program created to provide a world-class education for children ages 3-5.



Everyday Cafe

Around 2010 Pastor John Wallace began to share a vision for a third space for Homewood residents, community leaders, entrepreneurs, and others to meet, greet, conduct business, and build relationships. The inspiration for this vision came from the book, *The Great Good Place*, by Ray Oldenburg. *The Great Good Place* describes the importance of “third spaces”—places that are not home, and not work, that people use to build community and that help to catalyze neighborhood revitalization.



In the spring of 2010 faculty and students from Carnegie Mellon University led a series of design charrettes to get community input on their aspirations for what was originally known as Café 524 (from the building’s address, 524 N. Homewood Avenue). After a series of ideas, plans, and proposals, about the design, mission, and ownership of the café, the building, and the surrounding properties, were sold by the Urban Redevelopment Authority to private developers to create much-needed affordable senior housing for Homewood. The 41-unit housing development, known as Homewood Station Senior Apartments, was completed in June 2014.

Although Bible Center did not own the building, it continued to pursue the vision for a

third space for Homewood, and partnered with the manager of the space, to complete the buildout and to open Everyday Café in November of 2016.

Since its opening, Everyday Café has seen its vision for a vibrant community hub for Homewood come to fruition. The Café consistently serves high-quality food and beverages and has sponsored myriad community cultural events, speakers, poetry, art showings, community meetings, pop-up business events, health fairs, voter registrations, and daily opportunities for everyday people to meet, greet, and share a meal. Everyday Café is recognized locally and nationally as Homewood's gathering place, and in 2022 was the recipient of a national award from the Kraft Heinz Black Kitchen Initiative.



The University of Pittsburgh Community Engagement Center and Own Our Own Business Development Center

In the 1950s, the corner of Homewood Avenue and Kelly Street hosted two grocery stores, side by side—an A&P and Donahoe's Pure Food. On October 20th, 2013, two people were killed and four people were injured in an illegal after-hours club in what more than 60 years before, had been the A&P. Over the subsequent six decades, the former Donahoe's building had also become a community eyesore and detriment to the community, serving as a "store" from which used, and unfortunately sometimes stolen, merchandise was sold. After the double homicide, the owner of the two buildings, who lived in Atlanta, became motivated to sell the properties. At the time of the homicides, there were several aspiring buyers, including a local motorcycle club.

In what was largely a defensive effort to protect a critical block of the Homewood Avenue business district, Bible Center successfully acquired the two buildings in late 2015 and early 2016. Bible Center aspired to revitalize these two properties to benefit Homewood and continue to catalyze the revival of the Homewood Avenue business district. Bible Center's specific vision was to combine the two buildings and create a 20,000-square-foot business incubator, accelerator, and co-working space.

On June 24, 2016, the University of Pittsburgh issued



a press release proposing “Community Engagement Centers” that were, “designed to respond to communities that invite Pitt’s presence and will result in better coordination of the hundreds of activities and services already underway.” The press release directed community leaders who were interested in partnering with the university to create community engagement centers to contact Pitt’s Senior Vice Chancellor for Community Engagement, Dr. Kathy Humphrey.

In response to the press release, and consistent with Bible Center’s desire to not only create, but also attract resources to benefit Homewood, the church’s leadership met on Saturday, September 17th, 2016, and agreed to reach out to Dr. Humphrey to propose that Pitt consider the 10,000 square foot building, located at 622 N. Homewood Avenue, for its inaugural Community Engagement Center. On Tuesday, September 20th Bible Center’s leadership drafted and submitted an email invitation to Dr. Humphrey.

As part of its due diligence, the University of Pittsburgh formed a Neighborhood Advisory Council and engaged in over 300 conversations with Homewood residents and others, to ascertain support for a CEC and their desire to partner with Pitt to create mutually beneficial relationships between the university and the community.

Ultimately, the members and leaders of Bible Center approved a 15-year lease with the University of Pittsburgh to house Pitt’s Homewood Community Engagement Center. On October 18th, 2018, hundreds of Homewood residents, officials from the University of Pittsburgh, and representatives from Bible Center, cut the ribbon to celebrate the grand opening of the Homewood CEC in a multi-million-dollar adaptive reuse of 622 N. Homewood Avenue.

Since the opening of the CEC, thousands of residents have participated in dozens of programs, used the classrooms, computer lab, demonstration kitchen, conference rooms, meeting spaces, examination rooms, and other facilities of the CEC, and some have even found employment and been awarded contracts to provide goods and services to the university. Reciprocally, residents from Homewood and surrounding neighborhoods have invested hundreds of hours to help train Pitt students, and partner with Pitt faculty to advance knowledge through their participation in research and other community-engaged scholarship efforts that have benefited the university.



As a part of its agreement with Pitt, and its continued efforts to revitalize the Homewood Avenue business district, Bible Center retained roughly 2,500 square feet of space on the corner of Homewood Avenue and Kelly Street (626 N. Homewood Avenue) to house its Own Our Own Business Development Center—Bible Center’s entrepreneurship support organization. Since its founding in 2019, Own Our Own has graduated 127 business owners from the Own Our Own Entrepreneurship Academy. As a result of the pandemic, the academy pivoted to be offered online.

2 dead in Homewood club shooting

TRIB
LIVE

TRIBUNE-REVIEW | Sunday, Oct. 20, 2013 11:03 a.m.



JASMINE GOLDBAND | TRIBUNE-REVIEW

After the end of the pandemic, and the official opening of the Own Our Own Business Development Center late in 2023, the academy has met both online and face-to-face for specific programming. The center offers business support services to new and existing

entrepreneurs, including drop-in co-working space, a conference room with teleconferencing capabilities, a small meeting room, private mailboxes for entrepreneurs to establish a formal business address, as well as business coaching, consulting, and other support services.



SUMMARY

Encouragingly, every so often, we hear from residents, partners, customers, clients, and investors, that the work Bible Center has done over the past twenty years, and that we are still doing today, is making a positive difference in Homewood. On occasion, our efforts are even highlighted by the local media.

For example, a few years ago, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette featured a story entitled, “Bringing business back to a blighted neighborhood.” The story highlighted seven local efforts to support entrepreneurship in Homewood, five of which were projects initiated by BibleCenter

<https://www.post-gazette.com/business/bop/2019/11/04/Homewood-entrepreneurship-business-pittsburgh-Bible-Center-Church/stories/201910210110> (see the Selected Media section below for more stories).

And so, while the work is far from done, and Homewood’s transformation is still very much in progress, qualitative and quantitative data shared in this report, as well as the content published by others, suggests that we have made some progress on our vision to make our little piece of earth more like heaven. Accordingly, with the help of our friends, and God’s continued blessing, we are confident that Homewood’s best days are yet to come!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bible Center’s work on Homewood’s built environment has taken place over nearly seven decades and has involved literally hundreds of people, including volunteers, organizational partners, funders, architects, contractors, various city-, county-, and state-level offices, and numerous others. In this section, we want to collectively acknowledge and thank all of our supporters and highlight one of our critically important, but largely “behind the scenes” partners in particular.

Over the past twenty years, there have been several key financial supporters of Bible Center’s built environment work that we want to recognize. By the mid-2000s, when

we were getting started, many people, including some leaders in the region's philanthropic community, explicitly told us that they had given up on Homewood. Nevertheless, others believed in our vision and were willing to invest in our work. These core supporters include the boards, senior leaders, and program officers of the Richard King Mellon Foundation, The Hillman Foundation, the Heinz Endowments, Westminster Presbyterian Church, and, of course, members of Bible Center Church, many of whom continue to support the work, even though they have moved to other regions of the country.

As highlighted above, the University of Pittsburgh has also been a key partner in Bible Center's built environment work. Pitt, including its faculty and students, has been especially instrumental in the development of Oasis Farm and Fishery, including the bioshelter, the solar arrays, and the transformation of 622 and 626 N. Homewood Avenue. Our partnership with Pitt has married the myriad resources of the university, with the tremendous assets of Homewood and its residents, to create a national model of university and community collaboration.

Bible Center is proud to have played a part in bringing Pitt to Homewood. We are also proud of the tremendous positive impact that the partnership is having on the social, economic, and physical well-being of many of our residents, young and old, and the revitalization (withintrification) of the Homewood Avenue business district and beyond.

As we finish our acknowledgments, we want to take a few minutes to recognize and express our deep appreciation for Bible Center's real estate law firm, Reed Smith, and more specifically, for our attorney, Peter Kogan, who has worked pro-bono, for Bible Center since the mid-2000s offering support and guidance on our withintrification mission.

Withintrification—the results of Bible Center's efforts to create clean and green lots, paint beautiful murals, and transform formerly vacant and abandoned properties from dangerous liabilities to vibrant neighborhood assets, is very visible. The process required to do the work of withintrification, however, is often quite invisible. The invisible, yet critical and seldom talked about, or written about, work of withintrification includes things like finding delinquent property owners, clearing titles in the names of people long

dead, getting back taxes abated, liens removed, writing and fighting contracts, and, on occasion, even going to court.

The experience, expertise, commitment, and tenacity required to do neighborhood-, and often parcel-level development, is tremendously difficult and detailed work, that relatively few faith- and community-based organizations have the ability to accomplish alone. Bible Center's help with this work—Peter Kogan—has literally been a Godsend (capital G intended!).

Our relationship with Peter began “serendipitously” in 2005 when Pastor John was searching for a real estate attorney to review a lease for a family-owned business. This initial request launched what has become an almost 19-year friendship.

As their connection deepened, Pastors John and Cynthia Wallace sought Peter's advice in acquiring various abandoned properties and vacant lots, and with the purchase of former Rite Aid, at 717 N. Homewood Avenue, the property that became Bible Center's Worship Arts Recreation & Ministry (WARM) Center.

Over the years, Peter has helped Bible Center with the legal aspects of at least seven different property deals, ranging from new purchases, to lease reviews, property acquisitions, and land swaps, and he has provided invaluable advice on construction contracts and negotiations and insights for grant proposal development.

Through his work with Bible Center Peter says he has become familiar with the various other nonprofit organizations and dedicated local leaders in Homewood who are striving to counter the negative publicity and highlight Homewood's vast potential. He has also come to know Homewood's unique advantages such as flat acreage, a defined business district, proximity to higher education institutions and rich cultural assets, and its significant history.

Peter says he can see a bright future for Homewood. However, he is aware of the need for quality affordable housing. He is an advocate for policies and programs that address conditions caused by absentee landlords and that will promote homeownership. He also says he is inspired by the rare opportunity for community leaders, investors, and

residents to work together to “get right” the preservation of Homewood’s historic identity and assets while reviving home ownership and the business corridor.

According to Peter, his partnership with Bible Center has been transformative, both professionally and personally. While his practice primarily involves large corporate developers, working on community-focused projects, like those he has worked on with Bible Center, has allowed him to practice the fine strokes of small-scale community development. He noted that he finds immense satisfaction in helping to preserve and enhance Pittsburgh’s heritage and culture, believing that history shapes our identity. And that being part of the solution and contributing to the community’s growth alongside the passionate and mission-driven leaders of Bible Center Church, has been a fulfilling experience, for which he is profoundly grateful.

Jeremiah 29:7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”



GLOSSARY

Adaptive Reuse—"the process of refurbishing a building for purposes other than those that it was originally built for." As a sustainability practice, adaptive reuse, "prolongs the lifespan of existing buildings in an attempt to limit further resource and energy consumption, which in turn helps reduce the amount of waste and harmful emissions produced by the world's built environment."

Ministry—programs and services provided by members of Bible Center Church to honor God and to demonstrate His love to people, irrespective of whether they are members of Bible Center, ascribe to the Christian faith, or any faith at all.

Multi-Use Spaces—using buildings or facilities for multiple functions.

Stewardship—the careful and responsible management of everything God has entrusted to our care, recognizing His ultimate ownership, and seeking to use His resources in ways that benefit others and that honor Him.

Withintrification—community development initiated from within a community, driven by its residents, organizations, and leaders, rather than external forces. The intent is to uplift and revitalize low- to moderate-income neighborhoods, to minimize displacement of existing residents, to catalyze local employment and business ownership, and to celebrate and preserve the culture and historical integrity of the community.

Selected Media Links

<https://nextpittsburgh.com/pittsburgh-for-all/everyday-cafe-in-homewood-gets-a-jolt-from-black-kitchen-initiative/>

<https://www.post-gazette.com/business/bop/2019/11/04/Homewood-entrepreneurship-business-pittsburgh-Bible-Center-Church/stories/201910210110>

<https://www.pghcitypaper.com/news/pastors-john-and-cynthia-wallace-want-to-make-homewood-an-oasis-for-locals-25455962>

<https://refounder.com/stories/john-wallace/>

<https://www.pitt.edu/pittwire/pittmagazine/features-articles/homewood-cbt-church-program>

<https://nextpittsburgh.com/neighborhoods/homewood/next-up-john-wallace-on-why-you-should-get-to-know-one-of-pittsburghs-greatest-neighborhoods/>

<https://newpittsburghcourier.com/2021/05/04/everyday-cafe/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOPzXWm1vF4>

<https://www.post-gazette.com/life/dining/2022/06/21/everyday-cafe-homewood/stories/202206230002>

<https://chathamcommunique.com/4725/news/withintrification-bible-center-church-is-changing-the-homewood-community-one-project-at-a-time/>

<http://theglassblock.com/2016/10/13/food-policy-oasis-homewood-stephanie-boddie/>

https://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/2018_Issue_1-complete.pdf

<https://nextpittsburgh.com/city-design/everyday-cafe-homewood/>