

# Camp Restore Detroit: A Beacon of Hope

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**Imagine this** ... a whole community disappearing before your eyes. Once vibrant, beautiful areas of your community first turning unimaginably violent for decades, and then, as the violence begins to diminish, the wreckage left behind is slowly abandoned. Today, dotted among the vacant lots, are burned-out houses and fields so overgrown that wildlife has begun to reappear. Those residents left are a combination of seniors that have lived their lives in the area and families that are starting new. Most have weathered years of violence and the more recent economic storm. Even though crime is now at a 50-year low, the 25% of the population left in the area have little hope of regeneration and rejuvenation. Vacant lots sell for \$100, while houses that can be salvaged and renovated sell for \$1,000. It feels as if this section of Detroit has been forgotten.

## Yet, it has not been abandoned.

Situated on the corner of Chalmers and Seymour is an oasis known as Mount Calvary Lutheran Church. The church members, too, have weathered what has been termed a “hurricane without water” in the community. They, along with the small percentage of the population, remain. While many thought the church would close its doors, they stayed strong in faith and continued to be a beacon of Christ’s love in the community. Dreams formed and this year, with just 30-plus active members, they stepped out in faith. Instead of closing the doors, they signed on the dotted line for \$250,000 and Camp Restore Detroit (CRD) was born. These funds were available through a returnable funding program from the Michigan District, partially

funded by the **Here We Stand** Campaign. The \$250,000—which will be disbursed over several years—has already been put to good use in setting up the camp. Together with valuable insights and administration help from Camp Restore New Orleans and Baton Rouge, CRD has begun to instill hope and faith in its community.



Mt. Calvary members Ron Varty and Susan Riske visit with Mrs. Elizabeth Higginbotham (at center), who lives near the church

## What is Camp Restore Detroit?

CRD is a bridge to the community that provides volunteers—from all over the United States—wishing to partner with the community to bring hope and restoration back into the people. The camp provides beds and food to volunteers, and coordinates all their service and partnerships in the city.

## Community Connections

Imagine this ... a group of Detroit police officers assigned specifically to getting to know their neighborhood communities—men and women who see and experience the wreckage in their communities daily—literally jumping out of their chairs in excitement as they find out that help is here in their precinct not just for the short term, but for years to come.

It was truly an amazing moment. The collective awe that could be heard around the table as community block leaders—people in the community that are spearheading the often frustrating and exhausting effort to clean up their neighborhoods and create a better future—learned that hundreds of volunteers were coming to partner with their efforts, to work side-by-side with those living in the community to create a better present and a better future for their families.

Imagine the excitement and anticipation of a young child watching a brand new playground being installed in his neighborhood and being the first one to play on it.

Imagine the amazement of overburdened, poverty-stricken homeowners who find that volunteers are coming to help with small home repairs that enables them to stay in their homes and keep their families living in a safe environment.



There is renewed hope in the community as the church creates and promotes community through the building of playgrounds, planting of gardens, and renovating three houses to provide a combination of community outreach and services.

The new playground installed next to Mt. Calvary. The white house in the background is the one volunteers were working on. The brick house behind that is Mrs. Higginbotham's.

CRD is not limited to serving its immediate neighborhood. Detroit churches were overjoyed when they learned that volunteers will help lead and support their outreach to children and adults in their communities as well.

CRD's new reality is, simply put, an amazing testament of God's love for His people.

## Powered by Volunteers

CRD started out small last year but had many weeks of camp booked for this summer. Originally, the sentiment was, *"What are we going to do with all these volunteers?!"* After meetings with the Detroit Block Club leaders, youth centers, the police, and area churches, the new sentiment is, *"How are we possibly going to accomplish all this?! We need more volunteers and campers!"*

Three abandoned houses adjacent to the church property have unexpectedly been deemed renovation-worthy by the city of Detroit. While they are in rough shape, once restored they will house centers for children's ministry, art, music, and adult skills such as resume writing, job skills training, and more!

Restoring abandoned homes is quite an undertaking that was not originally planned by the congregation, but they are moving forward in faith. The homes need EVERYTHING: roof, walls, stairs, electrical, drywall, paint, flooring, bathroom fixtures, furnaces, sinks, and more.

Young and older volunteers are needed to commute daily, or stay overnight at \$40/person. CRD provides three meals each day, housing, and project coordination for groups. The camp will soon have 80 beds, and will be open year-round.

There are a variety of other ways to serve. This summer, volunteers are needed to cook and serve meals, staff vacation Bible schools, turn vacant lots into garden areas, help with a Police Block Party, and serve during two community clean-up days. There are also daily requests for volunteers to help the area block leaders improve their surroundings.



Volunteers working on a house adjacent to the church

In April, a team of 24 high school youth and their leaders came for a week of demolition and clean-up. Heidi Marcotte, adult leader from St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in Duxbury, Mass., shared, *“Our kids wait to do this [mission trip] all year ... we’ve been to Camp Restore New Orleans and Baton Rouge 10 or 11 times. This is our first trip to Detroit. The teens have found this area to be vast, very lonely ... similar to what you see in natural disasters. But once they got to work [hauling tons of debris] and started taking down walls, they could see the potential for new life, new growth, and hope. This is the highlight of the trip for them.”* She continues, *“Mount Calvary and Camp Restore Detroit people are amazing. The food, the hospitality, the personal contact, the setting up of work, has been phenomenal.”*

## **There are Many Ways to Support CRD**

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CRD is a great opportunity for you to spread God’s love and hope to those in Detroit by improving the surroundings—one day and one project at a time. The rebirth of the City of Detroit itself is wonderful, giving CRD an opportunity to spread this urban renewal beyond the city limits to the surrounding areas. Your individual and congregational donation of time, money, and/or material is also appreciated.

Please join us! Pastor John Carrier of Mount Calvary says, *“There are many opportunities to serve Jesus, to share God’s love, to build, [and] to get closer to one another as you spend time working and serving together.”*

Contact CRD at [detroit@camprestore.org](mailto:detroit@camprestore.org) or 313.527.3366. To learn more, see photos of activities completed to date, and a list of items needed, visit [mtcalvarydetroit.org](http://mtcalvarydetroit.org).

*Photos by Elisa Schulz/Michigan District, LCMS*