

WORKSHOP: HOME OWNERSHIP & HEALING OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOODS

— From Pastor Lynice Pinkard & Nichola Torbett —

For some time now, we have been concocting a long-term vision for facilitating the movement out into our city of the Spirit of life that is being catalyzed here at First Congo.

As the first step in that process, we've formed a partnership with Red Oak Realty and Operation Hope to address the foreclosure crisis that is threatening our most at-risk neighborhoods. In the process, those of us who thought we would never be able to buy a home in Oakland can be supported in doing so.

IMAGINE

- owning your own home and cultivating intentional community in the neighborhood
- putting your gifts at the service of your neighbors and receiving their gifts
- participating in urban sanctuaries where people can build relationships; learn anything from liberation theology to holistic self-care to leadership skills; and be rejuvenated for their work in the world
- building capacity for the life of God in your community

Buying a home in West Oakland, East Oakland, or San Antonio is not just a good investment in your own financial security (because prices are low and the housing market will rebound) but is a commitment to a struggling neighborhood. When foreclosed homes stand empty, the housing values of those left behind plummet. If large investment companies snatch up the foreclosures, as they are likely to do, they will board them up and sit on them until the market turns, creating urban blight and dangerous conditions for the people still left living in the neighborhood.

We have the opportunity not only to create a stable presence in these neighborhoods, but to actively work with neighbors to heal and transform them. Our hope is to seed neighborhoods with multiple First Congo households, and then, just as yeast leavens the dough, we will support each other in building community there.

Here's how the process will work:

HOME-BUYING SUPPORT

The first step is to come to a workshop on **Sunday, October 26, from 1-3:30pm**, on how to purchase a foreclosed home.

In many cases, the mortgage payments on these homes will be no higher than the rent you are already paying. Even if your credit isn't great or you don't think you have the savings to buy a house, Operation Hope can help you make the changes you need to make to qualify for a home loan. Some of us may buy together to form unconventional households committed to each other's spiritual growth as well as our physical and material well-being.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Those of us who take advantage of this opportunity will support each other in building community in our neighborhoods. For example, we might start or join neighborhood organizations, block clubs, or neighborhood watches and organize opportunities for neighbors to socialize, build relationships, and form genuine community.

Through a partnership with the newly incorporated Seminary of the Street, those who are interested can learn leadership skills to become “community pastors.” These neighborhood lay leaders will serve as resources, connecting neighbors to needed services and encouraging them to commit to their own wholeness as we work toward our own, overcoming addictions and self-destructive habits that keep us from full aliveness and limit the life of the Spirit in the community.

URBAN SANCTUARIES

In partnership with another newly forming nonprofit organization called Urban Sanctuaries, we will also have the opportunity to participate in the creation of spaces for God’s life in our communities. Imagine centers where people come to exchange their gifts: bodywork, community healthcare, counseling, classes in anything from employment skills to liberation theology, community forums, dances, and so on. These Urban Sanctuaries will also offer counseling groups working to overcome the effects of internalized oppression and privilege.

If we can show that we are catalyzing life in these struggling communities, we will have no problem securing funding for these projects. Our efforts will be limited only by our own imaginations and willingness to put ourselves to God’s service. But the first step is to come to the workshop on October 26. We hope to see you there! If you have questions about this project, contact Nichola at ntorbett@hotmail.com or 510-225-8561.