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Dear ICCF friends and partners,

In mid-August, I had the opportunity to attend an author event with Richard Rothstein, who wrote The Color of Law, a book I recommend to anyone who wants to better understand our housing crisis and how to fix it. Challenging conventional views on the root causes of segregation, Rothstein writes:

Today’s residential segregation in the North, South, Midwest, and West is not the unintended consequence of individual choices and of otherwise well-meaning law or regulation but of unhidden public policy that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States.

After reading this well-researched book, it feels tempting to fall into despair – after all, how can we hope to move the needle toward justice when segregation was built into our cities and towns by law? But I also feel hope and renewed purpose, because the ICCF team and our many partners in West Michigan are already taking steps to combat this unjust legacy, including some actions suggested by The Color of Law.

For example, ICCF promotes intentionally inclusive housing by providing quality homes for rental or purchase by low and moderate-income families in safe neighborhoods. Our team also offers education, counseling, and financial assistance so that people who have previously been locked out of quality housing can become homeowners in the time and location of their choosing, and we’ve increased affordable housing in areas experiencing economic revitalization and opportunity throughout the city.

Many of you who are reading this have also given your time, resources, and insight to help us seek justice and demonstrate the compassion God has called us to.

So we do not give up hope, because even in a world marked by segregation and injustice, we are making positive steps toward change. Thank you for being part of this hope.

Ryan VerWys
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A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO
My prayer is that the Lord would fill the home with the love of a family, that the rooms would contain conversations that promote peace and relationships that flourish, that the kitchen table offers a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, that the bedrooms provide rest from labor, that this house becomes a home where the Lord is finishing his good work in the residents for the glory of his kingdom.

-Rev. Hoogeboom

The flourishing housing market in Grand Rapids, says Hoogeboom, has been a benefit to many. But for other families, it’s been crippling. Rent has skyrocketed, housing options are limited, and waitlists are long. In response to this, ICCF launched the Community Homes Initiative in spring 2018 and has so far preserved 213 housing units for low- and moderate-income residents.

One Family at a Time

In the midst of such a large crisis, it may seem daunting to invest so much in 213 units, or even just one. Weismann acknowledges, “We have a very small role in this, but we want to play whatever part that looks like for God, and His kingdom, and His community.” These churches recognize that the only way we are able to make an impact on the entire community is one family, and one home, at a time.

To get your church family involved with the Community Homes Initiative, contact Katie Brower at kbrower@iccf.org.

IMPACT OF YOU: ONE FAMILY AT A TIME

Four churches step up and sponsor Community Homes Initiative properties to create beautiful, welcoming places to come home to.

“God, if we’re going to be in the city, how are we going to be good neighbors here?”

That’s Jeremiah Weismann talking, City Missions Director at Crossroads Bible Church. It was that question which sparked his church’s involvement with our Community Homes Initiative this year. Crossroads was actively seeking a way to be the hands and feet of Jesus to their neighbors, many of whom were facing eviction and homelessness. Crossroads is just one of four churches who are currently investing in their neighborhood through renovating an ICCF community home. For a local family, they are creating a welcoming place to come home to.

These churches - Crossroads Bible Church, First Byron Christian Reformed Church, LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, and Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church - have elected to “sponsor” one of ICCF’s newly acquired homes and make it move-in ready for a family. The projects include in-home renovations and repairs, landscaping, and beautifying the space for the new tenants. Crossroads, which has sponsored two different homes, has a goal to see the renovations “done with excellence” to show the occupying family how much they are loved and valued.

A new furnace for the First Byron home was donated by a member of their church family, and they held a special offering to help cover the costs of the renovations. The church is located all the way in Byron Center, Mi; the Community Homes Initiative has provided a way to extend their influence all the way to the heart of Grand Rapids and meet a very real need. In contrast, Rev. Mike Hoogeboom and the other members of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church are less than two miles away from their sponsored home.

The mission of Sherman St Church is to be a living testimony of God’s grace and justice in the city,” shared a Sherman St neighbor. “This initiative is just that.

More Than a Project

Steve Elenbaas, Director of Ministries at First Byron Christian Reformed Church, recognizes that this initiative is more than just a new volunteer project. He describes how tasks like drywall, painting, flooring, electrical, and plumbing work have a lasting kingdom impact when done in Jesus’ name. Elenbaas says it is an opportunity for area churches to fulfill the Biblical mandate to “help the least of these.” It is also a tangible way for church members - with skills in carpentry, plumbing, gardening, etc. - to use their own gifts and talents.

1035 Dunham during renovations sponsored by Sherman St Church.

1114 3rd Street sponsored by Crossroads Bible Church

Hooeboom describes how their ministry team, which had long assisted local families with housing needs, has recently been noticing a change. “In the past,” says Hoogeboom, “local landlords would work with tenants through a crisis until they got back on their feet.” Now, many families are finding themselves evicted after just a single month’s late payment.

There is such a great need for low- and moderate-income housing in the Grand Rapids area, and waiting lists are so long, that tenants are not given a chance to make up the difference. Rising cost of rent, loss of a job, serious injury or illness, or other factors may lead to the inability to pay, and they are evicted immediately. There is another desperate family ready to take their spot, and the cycle begins again.

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COMMUNITY COUNTS

In fiscal year 2018 we reached more neighbors through our emergency shelter program, financial education, and housing counseling services.*

- 370 participants engaged in Housing Counseling
- 75 people graduated from Financial Capabilities classes
- 154 adults and children were assisted in emergency housing at Family Haven
- 711 individuals completed Introduction to Home Ownership classes

“*It’s not an easy process, but it’s so worth it in the end”

Katasha Davis is a mother of two and GM employee who recently bought her first house using ICCF’s Individual Development Accounts (IDA) program. She also took part in housing counseling and homeownership classes. Previously she had moved from place to place and did not have consistent savings. Now she has a house and saves money regularly. She says the first thing she did after moving in was “Painting. My daughter always wanted a pink room, and now she has one.” School and work are now close to home, giving her more time to spend with her kids, continue painting, and work on house projects. Her children have their own rooms for the first time, and many of their friends also live in the neighborhood. Ms. Davis’ advice to future IDA participants: “Take your time, set goals and try to reach them on your own time. Take it one step at a time. It’s not an easy process, but it’s so worth it in the end.”

Thank You

We celebrated our volunteers and donors with a special ‘Summer Soirée’. Thank you for your continued investment in ICCF and its work to create equitable opportunity, affordable homes, and thriving neighborhoods.

- Total Number of Volunteers in Fiscal Year 2018: 524
- Total Number of Volunteer Hours in Fiscal Year 2018: 2,576

Estate Gift Completes a 30 Year Record of Faithful Giving

Last month ICCF received a final gift from the estate of a long-time friend who passed away in January at age 87.

Beginning over 30 years ago in 1986, she and her husband had given a modest gift to ICCF almost every year. Eighteen years ago, in 2000, they included ICCF, along with some other charities, in their wills.

Their record of consistent giving to ICCF was one of many signs of their life-long faithfulness. That record, coupled with their final end-of-life gift, is a testimony to their firm belief that, both in life and in death, they were blessed to be a blessing. May God be praised!

Perhaps you’re now at a juncture like our friends were 18 years ago, a time to rethink your estate plan and update your will. Perhaps you’re wondering how you too can best provide for your family and also continue your support for those causes you care most about.

If you would like information about leaving a bequest in your will for ICCF, or if you have questions about special gifts of stock or real estate, for instance, Hank Kroondyk, ICCF’s Planned Giving Specialist, would welcome your call or email at 616.336.9333 ext. 403 or hkroondyk@iccf.org.

*ICCF’s fiscal year 2018 was from June 1, 2017 to May 31, 2018.
"My prayer is...that this house becomes a home where the Lord is finishing his good work."

– Rev. Hoogeboom, Community Homes Initiative Partner

Read more inside.