

# HARTFORD CITY MISSION 2008/09

Holidays headlines From da hood

WINTER 2008-2009 WINTER 2008-2009 WINTER 2008-2009



Hartford City Mission is a few folks who are trying to learn what it means to love Jesus and live like him in the context of Hartford's northend neighborhood. We do this, in part, through some regular gatherings of smaller communities within the ministry which in 2008 have included Noah Summer Camp, Camp Noah After School, Noah's Art, Hartford YoungLife, Women of the Vine, and the Vine Street Blockwatch. Some of these groups get together at our ministry house in the northend at the corner of Vine and Edgewood Streets - 'the Vine', which is also where a group of folks connected to HCM are living together in an intentional community setting (*the Community of the Vine* and now joined by our friends living in a house a couple of doors down we call *the Branch*). In these pages, you can see what we've been up to lately, and a few ways we've seen God's presence in our midst. Maybe you'll see opportunities to join us in some way.



We can be contacted at the Vine, located at 280 Vine Street, Hartford, CT 06112. Our phone number is (860) 246-0132. If you're interested in pitching in with us, our volunteer Administrative Director, Scott Wilhite, can be reached at (860) 246-6655 or [scottw@hartfordcitymission.com](mailto:scottw@hartfordcitymission.com). Our mailing address is PO Box 320397, Hartford, CT 06132. HCM is a not-for-profit ministry and relies on the generous donations of our friends to support our work here, for which we are eternally grateful.



Hartford YoungLife

*Late in 2007, HCM's Board of Directors began taking a hard look at tL, our initiative for middle and high school students. We made a strategic decision to move in a new direction through a partnership with YoungLife, a national parachurch ministry that in recent years has expanded its outreach to youth in urban neighborhoods. Like HCM, YoungLife specifically reaches out to unchurched middle and high school students. Hartford's YoungLife program meets each week on Friday nights at SAND school in Hartford's northend.*

*The following was written by YoungLife volunteer **Harmony Lovell**. Ten years ago when she was a high school student, Harmony was a volunteer at HCM's first Noah's Sidewalk Sunday School program on October 31, 1998.*

Last winter I waited with great anticipation for our first Hartford YoungLife "Club" (Club is the weekly youth program we hold at SAND Elementary School). Having been an Urban YoungLife leader throughout my years at Messiah College, I felt very excited about this new ministry model that Hartford City Mission would be helping to bring here to the northend of Hartford. YL reaches youth through relationships, as YL leaders meet Kids on their own turf and show commitment to them through various YL activities. The YL model suggests that leaders ultimately "earn the right" to share Christ with our youth, as a result of ongoing relationships that nurture respect, trust, and understanding on the part of both leader and student.

So how are these relationships built? By hanging out with each other! It's the consistency of the leaders and students at these weekly Clubs that builds a foundation for these relationships to be built and opportunities for sharing the Gospel to become a natural progression.

And it's the natural progression of understanding the character of God and the relevance He has in our daily lives that I have seen developing in many of our students that has really revealed to me how God is at work. It's my realization that nothing we as leaders say or do on our own changes the hearts and minds of the youth, but rather, God working and speaking through us. It's those moments when a leader has the undivided attention of every student, because the simple message of God's love for them is ringing so loud and so clear that they can't help but be captivated by it. It's seeing our youth making right decisions, knowing that these decisions will be

the ones that honor God and others. It's seeing our youth write Christian lyrics to their songs, and listening to Christian hip-hop and rap. It's watching our youth pursue higher education, some even at Christian colleges, knowing that they are capable of great things, and viewing education as part of God's plan for their young adult lives. It's watching a student walk away from trouble rather than fight. It's our teens waking up early on a Saturday morning to complete work projects in order to attend summer camp. As a leader, it has changed my life to see these young men and women changing *theirs* . . . as a result of growing in a relationship with God and seeing the immense love He has for us, and desiring to serve and honor Him with our words, thoughts, and actions. I truly have seen God working in the lives of His Kids in the northend of Hartford!

But the transformations I have seen take time. Nothing happens overnight. Still, I'm encouraged, trusting that God is working in their hearts, and seeing the results in the way they've begun living and serving. And I too am being changed. I find that God reveals a lot to me through my time in Hartford, and I've embraced the way He is working on my own heart as well, with hopes that along with our students, I'll allow my life to be a vibrant reflection of the relationship I have with Him. It's a challenge. But it's one we are meeting together. And for me, that's been the greatest reward of this youth ministry.



Allen, Preshous, and Harmony at YoungLife Camp at Lake Champion, New York.

## camp noah

"When I went to church I didn't understand a lot of what they were talking about. But when I went to Camp Noah I learned a whole lot about God!" - Ariel, Camp Noah camper

### Camp Noah: Summer Camp & After School

*"When is Noah's Sidewalk starting back up?"*

*We hear that question a lot from kids in the neighborhood. A year or so ago some of HCM's leaders started asking the question 'What would it take.... to make fully devoted disciples here in the northend of Hartford?' While we believe we've definitely seen good things from nearly ten years of the sidewalk Sunday school format program, we also agreed that a once a week, one hour event will always be limited in its ability to make real disciples of Jesus, no matter how well executed the program might be.*

*After looking at some other urban childrens ministry models, we decided to let go of the weekly Sidewalk program that really started it all & focus in a direction we think that could eventually help us see more young men and women in our neighborhood who are walking, talking, thinking, and living more like Jesus. So in the summer of 2008 we kicked off our new daily discipleship focus with Camp Noah, a half day program that ran every week-day through the summer, led by our children's ministry director, Leah Prescott, our HCM summer interns, our high school Street Leaders, and some great volunteers.*

*Then in September, Camp Noah After School followed, with a consistent group of kids meeting every day after school with staff and volunteers to read, to play, to love, to grow in relationship with one another, and hopefully to become a transformational little band of walking, talking, loving Jesuses in our neighborhood.*

I believe that Camp Noah 2008 was a major breakthrough for many of the people we were blessed to meet and spend so much time with this summer. Camp Noah was developed to be an active fixture in the northend communities of Hartford - a fixture that builds bridges and develops relationships with children and their families. Through volunteers, staff, and neighbors we registered more than 50 Kids for our seven week program - even more than we could fit into our facility at the Keney Park Pondhouse; on a daily basis we served anywhere from 20-35 Kids.

Our summer was packed with incredible activities. Some of these included:

- **Learning about God** through Bible stories and crazy skits;
- All Kinds of **arts & crafts**;
- Field trips to the State Capitol (we met our northend Senator Eric Coleman and State Rep. Russ Morin, who's the dad of HCM summer intern Patti!);
- **Creation-Exploration trips**: We went fishing in Keney Park, hiking and bug-collecting at Stratton Brook State Park in Simsbury, canoeing in Osbornedale

State Park (Derby), and even learned to fly fish at Housatanic Meadows State Park (these trips were made possible through the awesome folks at the State's Department of Environmental Protection and the Governor's 'No Child Left Inside' Initiative!);

- **Learning to Serve Opportunities**; cleaning the picnic areas of Keney Park closest to the Pond House;
- **Swimming** every week at the beautiful new Keney Park pool; and
- Learning how to get along & love people that may hurt our feelings.

Camp was a lot of fun, but it wasn't *all* fun. As a staff we faced some big challenges, some that we expected and some we didn't. For example, one night soon after we'd just gotten going, a car being chased by the Hartford PD drove smack into the Keney Park PondHouse - our camp site for the summer! Thank God no one was inside at the time. But we had to cancel camp for a few days while we waited for the city to make sure the building was safe for us to return to. Praise God we were able to return & finish up our awesome summer at HCM's first ever Camp Noah!



Amy and Deshawn reading together at Camp Noah After School.

# life in the vine

from jim

The Community of the Vine

*HCM's house on Vine Street is not just home to the ministry, but also to a group of folks who have chosen to live together in an intentional, communal lifestyle - sharing income, food, possessions, and life. The group is diverse in ethnicity, income, and age, and also in our experiences and understanding of God and grace.*

*Jim Schroder lived with us as part of this community for two years. Jim worked for InterVarsity and in the summer of 2008, directed HCM's summer internship. In August Jim moved to Philadelphia where he now works for City Year. We miss Jim a lot and are grateful for the time and energy he invested with us living at the Vine.*

Sometimes I forget that my life isn't really normal. A conversation I'm engaged in with a peer, discussing our different lives, can be comfortably moving along and then suddenly jerked to a grinding halt. *Whoops.* I forgot that living with a single mother and her three children (ages 2, 7, and 10) isn't exactly standard practice for single, college educated twenty-somethings. Maybe I shouldn't let that slip so casually?

Similarly, I'll be doing the usual round of introductions with new Frisbee players at the park and accidentally precipitate one of those awkward silences. *Oh, right,* I can't just say "I'm Jim, and I live on Vine Street in Hartford's Northend" and expect everyone to move right along. Alright, alright, I'm cornered, I admit it - my life just isn't standard.

Even worse, often it's down right overwhelming. I swear there's a conspiracy between the needs and violence around us, the complexity of economics and education in our urban neighborhood, and all those

*After all, in Luke 12 Jesus explicitly promises freedom for those who sell their possessions, give to the poor, and seek the Kingdom. To me, that sounds highly impractical.*

reappearing dirty dishes in the sink, clothes on the floor, and unfinished chores, all to make us give up on either ourselves or Jesus.

It's nuts, but I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Living in our Community at the Vine in Hartford allows me to experience the freedom and love promised in following Jesus in ways I didn't even know to ask for. It's living here where the Spirit has pushed me, as a person with wealth, privilege, and possessions (or at least a college degree and a steady job) to truly live out the freedom that Jesus offers.

After all, in Luke 12 Jesus explicitly promises freedom for those who sell their possessions, give to the poor, and seek the Kingdom. To me, that sounds highly impractical; nevertheless, through life here, Jesus has begun to free my clutching fingers from a few of the major messes of our culture - materialism and individualism. Knowing that freedom from that pair exists, knowing that Jesus has been there and can take us there, supplies an infusion of fresh vision to my weary dreams, even if I'm not there yet, and might never completely arrive there.

So on those days when I'm most struck by my out-of-stepness, when one more lost job, lost life, or lost toy might just send me packing, I try to remember. *Jesus is here,* in the mystery of His presence among the materially poor. My freedom is here, in the mystery of His presence in our community. Life, love, learning - all here. How could I decide to choose another way to live?

## WANTED: PAINT CREWS

HCM is calling all painters & wanna-be painters to help us give the basement of the Vine a new look. Since September, our basement has been home to our Camp Noah After School kids program, along with other HCM larger group activities. But the barely primed, now dirty white walls, combined with the glare of the overhead fluorescents, give the space a look more fitting for Aetna actuaries than crazy Camp Noah kids (nothing against all you Aetna actuaries out there!).

Maybe you've got an inner wall-painter in you, yearning to bust free? Grab some friends (it's a big basement), give us a call & come spend a Saturday giving the Vine's basement a makeover! (those three-day holiday weekends would be great, so the paint fumes would have an extra day to clear out before the kids return.)

**pictures from a summer . . . . (cont 'd from page six)**

Being around the campers taught me patience. As camp went on I listened to what the Kids had to say and learned to help them when they needed help. Some Kids may have had a rough day at home before they come to camp. In order to understand the Kids, you have to put yourself in their shoes and realize that some may need your help. Spending time with the Kids at Camp Noah would make me forget about the bad things I go through.

**Pictures from Patti Morin (intern):**

We'd been having an especially tough week at camp and had been tired and frustrated with the way things were going. So just for fun one day we decided to add a little beat to our usual camp songs to see if this might get the Kids excited. The campers were all sitting in a circle and Steve was leading the songs with his guitar and some beats that he produced on his Ipod.

The Kids got pretty excited about the beats and immediately stood up and started to move along with the music (up until that point we usually had to beg them to stand for songs). Soon most of the Kids were both singing *and* dancing. It was really a joy to watch and I was sad when the songs came to an end. Little did I realize that the Kids didn't care that there were no more words to sing. Steve just kept playing his guitar, the beat kept going, and the Kids kept dancing. Soon they started chanting the names of other Kids, encouraging them to come and dance in the middle of the circle. This went on for a while until every Kid's name had been called.



*This has been such an amazing summer. Camp NOAH was a huge success. Living in a community of other followers of Christ was one of the best things I have ever experienced. Being in the Northend was more than I could have ever imagined. - Julie*

Photos at top and bottom: Julie Ozbun (Intern), Patti Morin (Intern).

Then after a little pause, Jibreel started chanting "Camp Noah, Camp Noah, Camp Noah...". It caught on right away and soon all of the Kids were bobbing to the beat and chanting "Camp Noah!" This was a huge blessing and a definite turning point in the day.

**Snapshots during the Summer from Steve Carroll (intern):**

A lot of the Kids in the neighborhood are concerned about safety. A lot of them are scared to live where

they are... they're scared primarily because they realize that everything else in their life has failed them at one point or another. It'll be interesting to introduce them to a Jesus who never fails them, and who loves them like no one else can. I pray that Kids at camp will learn how much God loves them... just as I'm learning by being here. Living in a poor neighborhood with fully intentional people has been a real eye opening experience for me... and has changed some views of mine regarding what it means to actually follow Jesus.

**Hartford City Mission's**

**Opportunity to Double Your Investment in Hartford!\***

Between now and December 31, 2008, you can double your investment in Hartford kids and their families. Through a generous donor, HCM recently received a challenge grant offer of \$20,000, meaning all donations we receive up to \$20,000 will be matched by this donor.

Double your donation today! You can donate online with your credit card through our new website ([www.hartfordcitymission.org](http://www.hartfordcitymission.org)), or mail your check to Hartford City Mission, PO Box 320397, Hartford, CT 06132.

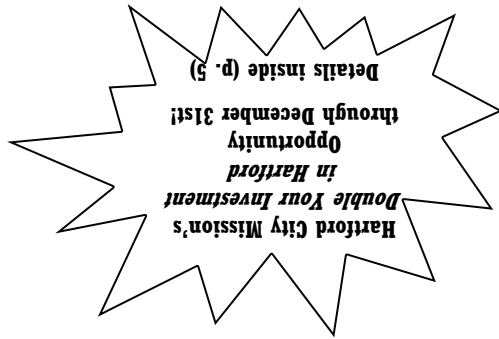
\* If your employer has its own matching program for charitable contributions, you may be able to triple your gift!

**six hundred forty apples in a day keeps a bunch 'o docs away**

Ahhh, October. Fall colors. Pumpkins on porches. Cornstalks. Apples. Apples. Apples. More apples.

Actually about 640 apples. That's how many the roughly 100 northend neighbors of ours - mainly Kids - peeled, cored, and piled into approximately 80 pies on Saturday, October 25th during our first ever 'Apple Pie Day'. We cleared out the furniture on the first floor of the Vine, covered the floors, & set up stations around the house for coring, for peeling, for crust making (none of that storebought stuff!), and crust-rolling/pie-filling. Every neighbor who came and either cored, peeled, kneaded, or rolled went home with an uncooked apple pie packed up in a Ziploc bag with instructions for mom to bake 'er up at home (of course, we baked a few ourselves & pulled out the ice cream just to make sure they were okay!). In the year & a half we've been at the Vine, it was definitely one of our funner - & most productive - days! Big HCM shoutout to Terri Dahlstrom, our awesome volunteer who not only inspired our Pie Day, but coordinated all the cutting, coring, rolling, pie-making madness!

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**HCM Internship**

## pictures from a summer in hartford's northend

During the summer of 2008 HCM brought four college students, from California to Rhode Island, to Hartford's northend, to live together in an Acts 2 community, helping to lead HCM's first ever summer camp for kids. Our interns, Patti, Steve, Brittany, & Julie, moved in the first floor of the Vine in June, spending the summer under the leadership of internship director Jim Schroder. During the day the interns were joined by HCM's Street Leaders (high school leaders from our YoungLife program), who helped lead camp & serve as role models for our campers. Below are some *images-in-ink*, captured by our Interns and Street Leaders from their experiences in Hartford during the summer of 2008:

### *A snapshot of Hartford from Brittany Sylvester (intern):*

A couple of years ago I never would have believed that I'd be living in a city, let alone one of the poorest cities in America. I also never would have thought that I'd enjoy it so much!

The people who live here have seen and experienced poverty first hand and can relate to one another on a deep level. I've found that the people I've talked to are much more open in sharing their thoughts and experiences

with others than those who live in a more suburban area. One night the other three interns and I went on a walk down our street. We met an older man who invited us onto his porch where we just sat & listened as he talked about his past and the things that he's learned over the course of his life. We felt so welcomed by him and his hospitality and were touched by the fact that he knew all of his neighbors by name! I truly will miss living in Hartford and am so thankful to have had the opportunity to learn from its community.

### *Pictures from Willis, Street Leader (& now Community of the Vine member and senior at Hartford Classical Magnet High School):*

Being a Street Leader helped me understand how much these Kids need someone to look up to and help them toward the right path.

*(cont'd on page 5)*



From top to bottom: Brittany Sylvester (Intern), Willis Knight (Street Leader), Steve Carroll (Intern) during Camp Noah.