

Hartford City Mission Strategic Vision 2011-2014

**“...for we have been given
the Ministry of Reconciliation”**

Paul, II Corinthians 5: 18

Hartford City Mission (HCM) is an urban-based Christian community development ministry committed to serving the spiritual, educational and social needs of Hartford’s northend neighborhood. HCM places a high value on the principle of incarnational ministry - encouraging ministry staff, volunteers, & even board members to consider residing in the community in which the ministry is focused, following the example of Jesus.

The programs and activities of HCM include Noah After School, Camp Noah, Noah’s Art, Hartford YoungLife, the Vine Street Blockwatch, and the Community of the Vine. HCM also sponsors a summer internship program for young adults and a summer youth employment & leadership development initiative - the StreetLeader program. These gatherings take place in the Vine Street ministry house (called ‘the Vine’) or in nearby schools and church buildings.

While there never seems to be a shortage of activities involving the very young to the very old, the core focus of the ministry is probably best summed up in one word: reconciliation. Living in the northend, we’re keenly aware of our own need to be reconciled – both to God and to our neighbors. Like the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, every day we see great chasms between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’, blacks and whites, those with a lot of education and those with little. We long for our ministry to be used as a greater tool for this reconciliation that we know is so desperately needed. This strategic plan is, in large part, the result of that longing, that dreaming.

But to help understand the direction we believe God is calling us in the *future*, it might be helpful to take a look back at our *past*.

HCM Version 1.0: The First Twelve Years

In 1997, inspired by the work of Brooklyn-based MetroMinistries, the largest urban children’s ministry in the US, three volunteers from three different metro-Hartford evangelical churches began praying and planning together to replicate a version of Metro’s *Sidewalk Sunday School* ministry in the city of Hartford. In October, 1998, *Noah’s Sidewalk Sunday School* was launched, with a focus on producing a high quality, weekly program that would both attract and teach Biblical truths to unchurched children in Hartford’s northend. Like Metro’s Sidewalk Sunday school, *Noah* was a mobile ministry, with a portable stage rigged onto a converted box truck. Rather than bus kids to a church service in a remote location, Noah took the gospel to the streets and met the kids on their own turf.

When attendance at *Noah* reached nearly 50 kids, a second site was introduced in another northend neighborhood. In 2001, as the original *Noah* kids reached their teens, a middle & high school ministry was started (now Hartford YoungLife), followed in 2003 by a weekly after school tutoring program operating first in one northend elementary school, with another added in 2004.

By 2004 Hartford City Mission, an umbrella organization overseeing the various ministry programs, was incorporated and designated a charitable non-profit (501c3) by the IRS. HCM's leadership defined its fourfold mission to:

1. **Share the good news of Jesus Christ** through word and deed
2. **Develop disciples of Christ** in the neighborhood who don't just profess a belief *in* Jesus, but who actually *believe* Jesus, striving to follow his words & his way of life
3. **Provide Opportunities** for Christians from a variety of backgrounds to participate in life-changing, reconciling urban ministry
4. **Transform Communities** as God's Kingdom expands in more hearts and homes in our hood.

By 2004/2005, an average of 150-200 Hartford kids and 75-100 volunteers from more than ten different Hartford-area churches participated in HCM's various programs on a weekly basis.

Home In the Northend: In the fall of 2004 a Catholic parish in the city came into possession of a boarded up, historic two-family Victorian home in Hartford's Northeast neighborhood – the neighborhood in Hartford's northend where HCM's ministries had begun. After learning about HCM's outreach efforts in the neighborhood through our friends at the Hartford Catholic Worker, the parish donated the property to HCM, along with nearly \$33,000 which would be used to jump-start rehab efforts.

During the next two years over 300 volunteers from more than twenty area churches and ministry organizations assisted with a complete renovation of the 100 year old home. The Vine Street house (nicknamed *the Vine*) now serves as HCM's ministry headquarters and has also provided housing for HCM volunteers, summer interns, and children and families involved with HCM ministries who at times have needed a safe shelter. The Vine houses HCM's office and hosts the Noah After School ministry, the Vine Street Blockwatch group, and other community gatherings.

Along with the creation of HCM's ministry home in Hartford's Northeast neighborhood, several core ministry volunteers chose to make their own homes in the same neighborhood. While in 1998 ministry leadership consisted exclusively of suburban volunteers, by 2011 a community of more than a dozen core volunteers had moved into the city, all living within a short distance of the Vine. Currently, HCM's one full-time staff member and four part-time staffers are all city residents.

Transition at Ten: In late 2007 HCM leadership began an assessment of the ministry's first decade of fruit and, while acknowledging that over the years dozens of children and youth had prayed to receive Christ through HCM's various outreach-oriented programs, the ministry had few maturing disciples. Subsequently, in the summer of 2008 HCM's Board and volunteers made the difficult decision to end the popular weekly sidewalk Sunday school programs in order to prepare for a transition to a more *relationship-oriented* model for our children's ministry. The new format, modeled in part after Jesus' own concentrated focus on a small group of followers, would invariably result in a reduction in the number of children participating in the ministry, but also significantly increase both the quantity and quality of time spent with each child.

In the fall of 2008 a new *Noah After School* (NAS) began. Overseen by a fulltime children's ministry director, NAS is now a daily after school program held at HCM's ministry house. The program is limited to 16 neighborhood children and utilizes a team of nearly 40 volunteers weekly (up to eight different volunteers each weekday). NAS focuses heavily on building long term relationships between northend children and older disciples of Christ. In a similar fashion, for the past three summers NAS has also operated a half-day summer camp for up to 40 neighborhood children. The camp is supervised by the Children's Ministry director, along with HCM summer interns, StreetLeaders (summer staff hired from HCM's youth ministry), and dozens of ministry volunteers.

As a result of the changes in the children's ministry, HCM believes a more holistic, Christ-centered counter-cultural community is being formed for *Noah* kids. While in 2007, kids participating in HCM's children's programs would have experienced direct engagement with the ministry an average of 35 hours per year (30 weekly one hour programs and 1-2 special events

In 2007, HCM kids were exposed to the ministry an average of 35 hours per year; by 2010 HCM kids were engaged with ministry volunteers and staff - in an encouraging, Christ-centered environment - an average of 350 hours each year.

annually), kids in *Noah After School* now engage with ministry volunteers and staff an average of 350 hours each year (NAS runs every weekday for about 30 weeks during the school year, while Camp Noah operates for 8 – 10 weeks each summer). Over the last two years, NAS has also provided more opportunities for family members of NAS children to connect with and participate in ministry-sponsored activities.

HCM Version 2.0: 2011 and Beyond

HCM's core leadership team is united in its belief that in order to more effectively fulfill its mission the ministry as a whole should move toward a more relationship-based model. As such, HCM's primary focus in the coming years will be three-fold:

- 1) **Programs → People:** HCM will continue to move toward a more relationally-based focus of ministry, using programs as a means to this end, rather than an end in themselves. While the number of overall participants in the ministry will likely decline – at least in the short-term - HCM ministry leaders are united in the desire to focus more intentionally on the development of deeper, reconciling relationships between more mature disciples and young Christians or seekers in the ministry (love that transforms = quantity of time + quality of time);
- 2) **Loving our Neighbors:** Of the City's 15 residential neighborhoods, Hartford's **Northeast** neighborhood is the most violent neighborhood in the City and one of the most economically challenged, shaped in recent years by a climate of *darkness* and *death*. The HCM family longs to be an agent in our neighborhood for *Light* and *Resurrection*. With our neighbors, we will encourage the development and expansion of a **counter-cultural Christ-formed community in Hartford, with a specific focus in the City's Northeast neighborhood where HCM's ministry is based** (see p. 8 for a map along with more information about our neighborhood). To this end, HCM intends to increase the *availability of* and *activities in* the Vine, our ministry house on Vine Street. Ministry spaces on the 1st floor and basement, the Vine's Community Garden, and the upstairs community living space will each become a greater nexus of HCM's emphasis on **reconciling and regenerative, relationally-based ministry** in Hartford's Northeast neighborhood;
- 3) **Build a Better Base:** HCM seeks to provide a more solid, sustainable foundation to enable staff and volunteers to more effectively fulfill the ministry's mission in Hartford. Historically, HCM has prided itself on doing much with little, with an unusually heavy reliance on volunteers to provide administrative and managerial oversight. While keeping organizational overhead and bureaucracy minimal, in many ways this has been to the detriment of the organization's paid staff and volunteers and has precluded the ministry from capitalizing on critical opportunities. With a continued mission objective to serve as a tool for reconciliation between rich & poor, black & white, suburbanites & city residents, and God & His creation, HCM sees a need to broaden and expand both its Board and its core ministry staff to better meet this and other ministry objectives.

On the following pages we provide a more detailed assessment of how Hartford City Mission leadership senses we are being led to move toward each of these objectives.

1. From *Programs* → *People*

HCM's vision for 2011 – 2014 will continue our recent transition from *collecting crowds* toward *developing disciples* who can mature in the context of an urban, Christ-centered community, and to build a sustainable and solid foundation for a lasting ministry in the northend of Hartford.

Over the next three years HCM's Children's & Family ministry and HCM's Youth & Young Adult ministry will expand and continue to encourage the formation of Christ-followers among children and young people in Hartford, while moving toward a more holistic approach to the ministry, with an added emphases on education, job readiness (for teens), responsible and maturing lifestyles, conflict resolution, and other applicable life skills.

The children's ministry and the youth ministry, which have for the most part operated independently of one another, will function more synergistically going forward and, by 2012, provide opportunities for HCM to maintain relationships with a young person all the way from 1st grade through young adulthood.

HCM Children's & Family Ministry:

2011 – 2012: Aided by recently completed modifications to the Vine, HCM will expand NAS's Vine site to 20-25 children, including the addition of 6th grade students, hire an Assistant Children's Ministry Director (part-time), and develop a **second northeast neighborhood site**. We hope to establish the second site in partnership with a church based in the Northeast neighborhood, and would eventually serve an additional 25 neighborhood elementary students.

2011-2012: HCM-sponsored Middle School: An exploratory committee will be created to research and make recommendations on the potential creation of an academically rigorous, Christ-centered middle school in the Northeast neighborhood for 60 – 80 5th – 8th grade students who would live within walking distance to the school. The school would be modeled in similar fashion to the Catholic *Nativity Miguel* middle schools located in inner cities across the country (including two currently operating in Hartford), and the StreetSchool Network of Christian schools in urban communities across the U.S. (including Danbury). The school would place heavy emphasis on neighborhood and parental involvement, along with extensive utilization of HCM volunteers and potential *AmeriCorps* volunteers.

Fall, 2013: Possible opening of HCM Middle School (5th grade only for first year). To meet this target date, a school headmaster would need to be hired by the summer of 2012 (while the school will coordinate activities with and recruit prospective students from NAS, it will operate as a standalone entity and not under the direction of HCM's Children's and Family Ministry);

Fall, 2013: In partnership with a church based in the Northeast neighborhood, start a third neighborhood site for Noah After School.

HCM Youth and Young Adult Ministry:

2011: Creation of **Young Adults ministry** to provide continued discipleship opportunities to unchurched post-high school-age adults up to age 25.

2011: To facilitate deeper relationships with ministry students, transition Young Life program from large group format for weekly program to a blend of large group & small group discipleship (*'Friday Night Family'*) format;

2012: Transition from part-time to full-time staff for ministry leadership;

2011–2012: Development of **Hartford WyldLife**, middle school ministry for 6-8th grades including the hiring of **Middle School Director** by 2012.

2012: HCM **StreetLeader** summer leadership training & employment initiative to be expanded with oversight shared by NAS Summer Camp Director and Director of Youth Ministry. Goal will be to create more intentional year-round discipleship/life skill training and expansion of *StreetLeader* youth.

2013 - 2014: Expansion of **Youth Employment** opportunities outside of *StreetLeader* program. An HCM-sponsored startup business, **VineCutters**, will provide job-training & youth employment through landscape & property maintenance services in Hartford and nearby suburbs. Student staffers will be recruited from the HCM/YoungLife ministry and will include spiritual formation and life skills development curriculum to be developed for HCM's *StreetLeader* program.

2. Loving Our Neighbors

The **HCM Children's & Family Ministry** (Noah After School & Camp Noah) & **Hartford YoungLife** will continue to serve as the core of Hartford City Mission ministries. At the same time, the Ministry's home located at the intersection of Vine and Edgewood Streets & the increased number of ministry leaders living in close proximity gives HCM a unique opportunity to expand **adult-focused ministries**. HCM leadership seeks to develop deepening relationships with our Vine neighbors and encourage a new neighborhood ethos of *Light and Resurrection*.

From 2011-2014, HCM will expand its neighborhood-based initiatives designed to **promote reconciliation and restoration of relationships** in Hartford's Northeast neighborhood. These initiatives will be based primarily at the Vine, HCM's ministry house, and will include:

- **Fruit of the Vine (FotV) Community Garden and Healthy Cooks Kitchen:** Overseen by a seasonal Market Master/Gardener employed by HCM, neighbors will be encouraged to grow and harvest fruits and vegetables in the Vine's community garden. In 2010 HCM established a partnership with the Medical & Dental Schools of UConn (*Urban Service Track*) which provided a team of students which helped build the garden's raised bed frames currently in use and conducted a

gardening/healthy snack class for Camp Noah students. In the coming years the ministry will seek to develop similar such partnerships to help teach healthy eating/cooking habits for neighborhood residents, including HCM Summer Camp students and HCM high school *StreetLeaders*, whose jobs will involve work in and promotion of the FotV Community Garden. More importantly, however, HCM intends the FotV Garden to be a neighborhood location for **reconciliation**, where neighbors can come and work together in the garden while building stronger relationships with each other and the Creator.

- **Neighborhood Organizing:** HCM will employ a fulltime Community Organizer to assist with neighborhood organizing and community initiatives under the leadership of the *Vine Street Blockwatch*, currently hosted by HCM, and led by neighborhood residents. Organizing activities may include: 1) helping residents more proactively address the nearly 100 properties identified as blighted in the Northeast neighborhood; 2) helping residents address drug & violence ‘hot-spots’ in the neighborhood (i.e., intersection of Capen/Garden Streets), the multiplication of non-licensed halfway houses in the neighborhood, etc.; 3) helping residents protect & enhance nearby Keney Park; and 4) organizing neighborhood block parties and other community-building gatherings, etc.

The extended *Community of the Vine*, consisting of Vine residents and other ministry volunteers living nearby, will continue to increase its leadership in the creation of more opportunities for reconciliation and relationship building with neighbors living in close proximity to the Vine. This will include informal neighborhood gathers like summer cookouts, *Apple Pie Day*, *Waffle Saturdays*, and recurring dinner/worship times at the Vine.

3. Build a Better Base

Infrastructure Development: The execution of HCM’s Strategic Plan for 2011-2014 will require a different and much stronger infrastructure than has existed thusfar within the ministry. HCM’s current ministry initiatives have already outgrown the oversight that current board members and other volunteers are able to provide. The development of a stronger and more sustainable northend ministry will require a stronger and more sustainable ministry foundation, including:

- **Board Expansion/Development and Creation of Key Oversight Groups.** HCM will seek to grow and broaden its existing Board with a renewed focus on increasing the Board’s racial, geographic, and experiential diversity. Key Oversight groups are being developed to provide more support to staff members and volunteers in our movement toward strategic goals.
- **Staff Development / Leadership:** Implementation of HCM’s Strategic Plan will require fulltime, dedicated leadership; consequently, by early 2012 HCM intends to have recruited and hired the organization’s first **Executive Director** (see p. 10 for HCM’s proposed staffing model). Timeframes indicated are, of course, tentative and will be revised based on when the ‘right’ prospective staff member or volunteer shows up in answer to our prayers!

(Build a Better Base section continued on p. 9)

SnapShot: Hartford's Northeast Neighborhood

The Northeast neighborhood is one of 15 residential neighborhoods in Hartford and home to Hartford City Mission. In many ways the seven mile journey on Route 44 from the Farmington Valley to the Northeast Neighborhood would present a more dramatic cultural shock than a typical trip from suburban America to Europe.

More than 10,000 residents live in the one square mile Northeast neighborhood of Hartford (by contrast the Hartford suburb of Avon has about 750 residents per square mile)

Racial/Ethnic Composition of the Northeast neighborhood: 82% African-American and West Indian; 18% Hispanic, <1% White (Simsbury: 97% White; Newington: 93% White; Wethersfield: 94% White)

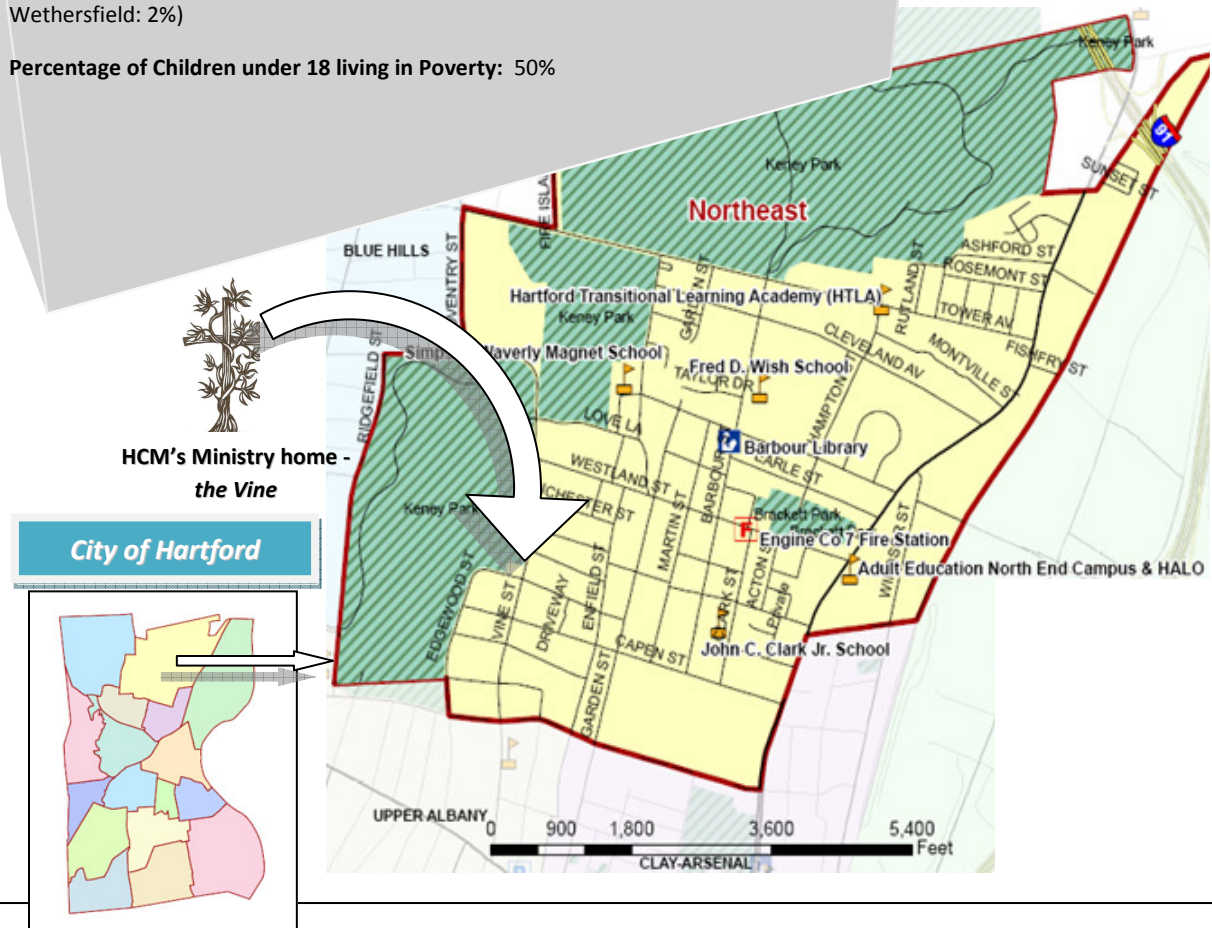
Housing: Of Hartford's 15 residential neighborhoods, from 2006 – 2010 the Northeast Neighborhood had more foreclosures than any other in the City, and 30% more foreclosures than the next highest neighborhood. Only **18% of all housing units** are owner-occupied (Wethersfield: 78%; Simsbury: 81%)

Median Family Income: \$23,100 (Avon: \$109,000; Wethersfield: \$86,000; Glastonbury: \$124,000)

Crime: Based on the number of aggravated assaults, homicides, and robberies, in 2010 the Northeast neighborhood was the most violent of Hartford's 15 neighborhoods.

Percentage of Families living in Poverty: 38% (Avon <1%; Rocky Hill: 1%; Wethersfield: 2%)

Percentage of Children under 18 living in Poverty: 50%



HCM will seek to strengthen its foundation with training and leadership development opportunities, including those offered by the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), a national nonprofit the mission of which is: *to inspire, train, and connect Christians who seek to bear witness to the Kingdom of God by reclaiming and restoring under-resourced communities.*

- **Ministry House Modifications:** To facilitate the Ministry's increased focus on building reconciling relationships with ministry participants and residents living near the Vine, HCM will initiate modest 1st floor renovations to the Vine to create larger spaces for both NAS and neighborhood use, while also providing smaller group meeting space for staff/volunteers. In 2012, 1st floor bedrooms will be converted into additional office space for the expanded staff.

- **Capital Campaign:** HCM's new strategic plan focusing on deepening our investment in and around our neighborhood is expected to rekindle enthusiasm among HCM's founding partners while building new energy among the ministry's more recent volunteers and supporters. Execution of the plan will, however, involve a substantial and sustainable increase in the Ministry's budget over the next four years. HCM will seek external assistance in the development of a strategic plan for a Ministry capital campaign.

To find out how you can participate in HCM's ministry vision for 2011 - 2014, or to obtain a copy of the financial budget that supports this strategic plan, contact Scott Wilhite, HCM's volunteer administrative director, at 860.712.7708, or e-mail ScottWilhite@comcast.net . HCM's ministry house is located at 280 Vine Street, Hartford, Connecticut, 06112. HCM's mailing address is:

*P.O. Box 320397
Hartford, CT 06132*

(Please address correspondence to HCM's PO Box as the Vine mailbox is not secure.)

HARTFORD CITY MISSION

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE 2011 - 2014

