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FAITH, FRIENDS & FAMILY

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With a little faith, anything's possible.

At least that's what staff members and volunteers from Life Church want to believe their work restoring dozens of houses and community spaces around Washington has achieved.

Since Life Church opened in 2014, 60 projects have been completed. Their work includes fixing residential properties for seniors, people with disabilities, or veterans. They also work on community spaces like parks and playgrounds.

This past year, Life Church established another nonprofit called The Dreamers Co., which is fueled by creating community development in Washington.

Aaron Miller, director of school of ministry and The Dreamers Co., wants to focus on making "renaissance a reality" for the city.

"Washington's been plagued by blights and there are so many spaces that have been forgotten," Miller said. "We've addressed vulnerable housing situations for residential areas in need. So when I say 'we are making renaissance a reality' it's more than just doing a project here and there. It's about bringing that sense of art and beauty back into the space again."

In 2014, three churches – Life Church, The Church of the Covenant and Washington Alliance Church – witnessed firsthand how making an impact locally was going to boost the city.

The churches then started a mission trip.

"We started a brief expression of a local mission trip, and for the past five years it's kinda grown from a local expression to a week-long work week where we have addressed over 60 properties."

This year, nine properties are in progress.

A lot goes into the restoration of these properties, Miller said.

They have partnered with the Citywide Development Corporation and the Redevelopment Authority of Washington County to help find the projects to work on.

Once the projects are found, the team assesses the needs of restoration and determines if they can help or not. If they are able to help, contractors come in to create a plan, volunteers are recruited and a work day is established.

If Life Church is working on a community space, "stakeholders" from the community are brought together to create a discussion of what should happen in the space.

"We talk to so many people even before we commit to a community space," Miller said. "We want to know



Dreamers Co. volunteers at work

Living the Dream

Washington church restores parks, houses throughout community



A Dreamers crew works inside one of the residential buildings.

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AARON MILLER,
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what people want. We'd discuss what would make this playground a space where memories and friendships are created instead of a blighted space that's left to pursue different proposals that aren't beneficial for anyone."

Washington Park, one of the parks on the list for renovation this year, is one example of community getting together to see what would be needed.

"We've been working with the park office for three or four years now to be a part of the overall vision of this transformation."

One of the mission's most frequent tasks lately has been cutting down dead trees around playgrounds and mountain biking trails.

"We're concerned of the children that want to play in that space," Miller said.

Aaron Miller's brother, Adam Miller, is a pastor at Life Church and oversees the church's coffee shop, The Table.

"Our heart was to have a footprint in the city," Adam said. "We believe in city transformation where things should continue to get better, but that hasn't always been the story for Washington."

The Table and the mission trips are the first initiatives Life Church has implemented to give back to its community.

"We're really passionate about good coffee," Adam said. "We're a specialty coffee shop – it's all about the details. We're not an assembly coffee experience. We want you to come in here and feel like you're about to sit around the table in your family home."

Hence the name, The Table, which is meant to invoke the experience of catching up with family and friends at the dinner table. Adam said it was to make everyone in Washington feel like they have a seat saved.

"It's all about bringing people together," he said.



ANNIE LANE

Should we go the distance?

Q I will be moving soon – several states away – and I'm torn about the state of my relationship. I've been with my significant other for five years. That's not something I can easily let go of. But we have been growing apart for some time now, and we've discussed that we both feel we'll break up eventually.

Our communication is second to none. He's game to make the move with me, but I worry that it wouldn't be good for him – or for me – in the long run, considering we agree we don't want to stay together all that much longer. Of course, he could move with me and find self-growth opportunities in our new place of residence. That part can happen independent of me, and our current relationship, should it come to an end.

But I feel guilty letting him make that jump when it may be wiser in the long run for us to go our separate ways. This we've talked about, too. Like I said, awesome communication. Any wisdom on how we should handle this? – Torn Traveler

A Breaking up with a partner is never easy, especially one you have been with for five years and have awesome communication with. If you both have agreed that you don't plan to stay together much longer, then why do you want him to move with you? Of course, it's a free country, and if he wants to follow you, that's his choice. But you would be wise not to encourage or discourage him either way.

If you think he wants to follow you because he wants a longer-term relationship, and you want to end it, then you must have a clear and direct conversation with him about the fact that your future plans do not include his involvement in your life. That would be honest and "awesome" communication.

Dear Annie: This is about your objection to those times when the bride and groom push wedding cake into each other's faces. It seems to me that the writer who objects to this, and your reply in support of him, are rather selfish. The bride and groom have been through weeks of planning, a long ceremony, the proper dinner, toasts, photos and wedding lines, all to make a presentation to the state, their families, their friends and the church, that they are committed.

After weeks of stress to please others, it is fine for the bride and groom to relax and let their hair down. A consensual face painting with cake is the couple being themselves, having fun, and showing the crowd a playful side. This playful side is a better demonstration of love than a stodgy ceremony. No damage done.

The writer seems more concerned about appearances than substance, which misses the whole point of a committed loving relationship; for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, in happy and in sad, in hard work and in play. Let's not omit the play! – Playful

Dear Playful: I'm printing your letter because I appreciate your reminder about the importance of substance, rather than appearances, in relationships.



Drs. Bob and Ron Good and the Good Orthodontics team volunteered with youth in the community to help The Dreamers in various areas of Washington recently.



A member of the Good Orthodontics team works to clear brush at a Washington playground in conjunction with the Dreamers Co.