

## A Measure of Hope

By Dae Forshtay

*What if your church measured its success by how many people moved out of the neighborhood? In a sense, that's the case with Crossroads Community Church of Philadelphia-Wissinoming. The church, which operates out of an old post office building, is in a residential area where people often feel "stuck."*

*"Some have moved here as a step up from the very worst neighborhoods of Philadelphia," shares Dae Forshtay, who now serves alongside her husband Pete, the Congregational Pastor of the church. "They struggle with drug addiction, prostitution, mental illness and homelessness."*

*Dae attended the church as a child. She observes that it was her first experience of a Grace Brethren (Charis Fellowship) church. Later her family began to attend another Charis church closer to their home.*

*"Because of the way I grew up," she explains, "I felt that what people really needed was a supportive church family. I decided I couldn't just be an attender." Dae had opportunities to go to Momentum youth conference, where she met Pete, who lived in Ohio and had always wanted to be in ministry. They were pen pals for a number of years, including when Pete joined the Marines after 9/11.*

*They married between deployments, but she comments, "We were both completely out of sync with what God wanted. We finally each recognized what the other one was doing wrong and started holding each other accountable. Through that we were able to correct our behavior and get back on track."*

*They became involved ministering to youth at the church she was attending. Some time later they were approached about helping with the re-opening of the church in Wissinoming. The goal was to have the church open on Monday nights for kids. Pete was to play guitar and they would just hang out with the kids.*

*"God pulled us there," Dae clarifies. "Our youth group kids all graduated, so we were free to take on this new ministry. We soon decided to move to the neighborhood. Our church helped us move, and are still great supporters of our ministry. We now live two blocks from the church."*

*Ministry in Wissinoming has a number of challenges. Over the years, the Forshtay's goals have changed and they now have two main goals:*



1. Raise the next church. Some adults contribute involvement, but for the most part it's the kids. "While the families are not consistent," Dae explains, "the kids are pretty consistent. Some of the kids in the youth group have been coming since childhood. Our plan is to keep investing in them so they will become those people who will invest back into their community. God has shown us how a community responds to ministry. We aim to teach the kids to be the church."
2. Help community members and friends who are in drug addiction and prostitution. "If we had enough staff overseeing who comes and goes and keeping things safe, we could open the building and run recovery programs," Dae observes. "There can never be too many recovery programs—people need to be in them every day." One thing she and her husband have noticed is that many are good people who "don't want to be this way." She notes that those who do come clean have to move elsewhere to get out of the temptations of the environment, a factor that serves as a deterrent to developing a stable core in the church.

Dae points out that they work with other Bible-teaching churches in the neighborhood. Their church is the entry point for many drug addicts, who say they feel comfortable because it isn't "snooty, all dressed up." That's why, she says, area church cooperation is so vital: "We catch 'em, another church cleans them up, and another disciples them."

One of the challenges they face is the fact that often after helping people through a crisis, they never see them again. She gives the example of their investment in a family in which a woman had 20 kids living with her who she was trying to help, including 13 grandchildren. She was kicked out of her rental because there were too many people living there. "The kids were scattered, and there's no way to get in touch with her now," Dae notes sadly.

"We became discouraged, after much investment in driving people to appointments, getting them into programs, then seeing everything fall apart. We realize now that God knows where their next step is. If we're just one step, that's fine. God allowed us to be a part of their journey. We've learned to be grateful for the time we had to help them. Our goal is to be a stable force in the community as people come and go."