From our Executive Director

Dear Friends:

COVID-19 has changed life for all Memphians. May this season provide us an opportunity to be more intentional about our growth as individuals and as a community. As we work together to support our neighbors, may we grow in our appetite for community and encounter God’s love for our city.

April marked the beginning of our Advance Memphis online Work Life class with Andrew Beach, Pastor of First Evangelical Church. The class was designed to meet our neighbors in bite-size experiences for the ultimate goal of long-term relationship.

Andrew encourages members to use their unique gifting in relationship with their neighbor. He is a leader of people by example, living a life of authenticity and personal accountability. He has a ministry of presence, as well as mobilization (of the church) in all that he does. He and his church are thankful for our Neighbor Block Party partnership with Advance Memphis because the relationships formed are rooted in the gospel and mutually beneficial.

At First Evangelical Church, they are working to strengthen our community by providing a lunch, conducting a mock interview, attending a Work Life graduation—these are all accessible venues to meet your neighbor, hear their stories, and know Jesus is at work in their lives. Marcus, our neighbor next door, experienced the joy of viewing himself as more than a victim of abuse but a man of dignity. Throughout the class, his response to the daily question, “How are you?”, was typically, “Alive.” As he began to assess the damage the trauma caused in his life, utilizing the tools of trauma healing began repairing his dignity. Marcus changed from answering “Alive” to “Excellent!”

It opened the conversation in such a way that our neighbors asked more questions and led to more questions. Our neighbor Darius (name changed for privacy) experienced the joy of viewing himself as more than a victim of abuse but a man of dignity. Throughout the class, his response to the daily question “How are you?” was typically, “Alive.” As he began to assess the damage the trauma caused in his life, utilizing the tools of trauma healing began repairing his dignity.

This understanding shifts thoughts from dwelling on that which we cannot control to focusing on aspects of a person’s well being and requires repair. This year, we incorporated a trauma healing curriculum into our Advance Memphis community. Relationships provide the blueprint for all we do. Andrew Beach, Pastor of First Evangelical Church, encourages his congregation to love their neighbor across the city from First Evan as they help lead our Neighborhood Block Party once Memphis Ministries at First Evan is able to resume.

Instructors (including Shandria Carter, Work Life Coordinator) used the framework of Work Life while insulating each lesson with trauma healing. It’s easy to see why one of our 2020 goals is to integrate trauma-informed care. Knowing that trauma knows no limit, we included our volunteers and offered a trauma healing training in January. Thanks to our friend, Kelleye Stelling with the Trauma Healing Institute, we were able to bring in experts who could equip our volunteers to address their own trauma, as well as begin counseling, a bold and aggressive strategy to repair his foundation of dignity as well as address the emotional needs of students.

Instructors in our revised Work Life class have focused on providing a lens for our neighbors to view their work, long term relationships and hope. We are praying for all of you during this constantly evolving public health crisis. Please see our website for more information on how you can put this challenging time of health crisis behind us.

Grateful to serve alongside you,

Jessica Litecky

Executive Director