



Generation One: Helping Churches Work Together to Transform the Third Ward

by Jonathan Brooks

Rice Temple Baptist Church and University Baptist Church are two UBA congregations committed to mobilizing members into ministry. They have found one effective venue for this mobilization in partnering with Generation One, a non-denominational ministry committed to the spiritual growth and physical rebuilding of the impoverished areas of the Third Ward.

Ministry opportunities are quickly evident. Numerous overgrown lots littered with used syringes, non-functioning refrigerator, discarded tires and 8-foot grass are also the playgrounds for many of the impoverished children living in the neighborhood.

Generation One desires to see those lots cleared and cleaned. In addition, Generation One also plans to tear down abandoned homes, help refurbish existing homes, provide life skills training for children and young adults, and to provide after school activities and tutoring for children. There is plenty of work for volunteers, and Mike Malkemes, Director of Generation One, is ready to make it easier for churches to get involved.

"Many people see the need in the Third Ward, but don't help because they don't know how to get started," observed Malkemes. "We are here to help churches and individuals get started.

"First, churches and individuals tell us what they want to do, how many volunteers they have, and how much time they want to invest. Second, we set up the logistics for the project. Finally, the church or individuals show up on the designated day and get to work."

Malkemes, noted that in the past people from the outside would minister in the Third Ward temporarily and then leave. Often the experience would leave both parties wounded. "We saw the need for a middle person to bridge the relational gap. We help set and communicate expectations for both parties. We work to ensure that both parties get value from the experience and are blessed."

Pastor Cliff Reiff and members of Rice Temple Baptist Church have experienced the effectiveness of partnering with Generation One. To date, Rice Temple has completed light construction projects in the Third Ward in cooperation with Generation One. They are participating in the after school mentoring program which began September 24 and will be helping with the Generation One Christmas party at which they expect 400 kids.

"They have done great work," said Reiff. "With the help of the city, Generation One has already removed some of the neighborhood 'shooting galleries' - dilapidated homes that function as places where people go to inject illegal drugs.

"The great thing about Generation One from a smaller church perspective (and probably from a larger church one as well) is that our church doesn't have to do the planning. They do all of that for you. You just show up with the materials you need and start working. Since we don't have the resources to fund a staff member who can plan missions projects, Generation One helps our ministry be more efficient and effective by taking care of that for us. In our collaborative efforts so far, our experience is that they have done a great job with the planning and having everything ready for us when we arrived."

The administration and organization offered by Generation One are helpful to larger-sized churches as well. Jeff Waldo, Associate Pastor, Discipleship at University Baptist Church (UBC), reiterated that working with organizations like Generation One is also about being good stewards of resources. Such partnerships help to maximize both administrative and financial resources.

Waldo noted that partnering with Generation One helps UBC be true (and effective as well as efficient) to UBC's value of mobilizing members into ministry. "It seems people have good intentions which grow into good works and sometimes, good organizations. As UBCers express their good intentions, if UBC does not have a venue to help, we try to connect the person with existing organizations attempting to express similar good intentions to produce good works in the world."

UBC first partnered with Generation One this past summer by hosting Generation One students in Vacation Bible School at UBC. "This initial contact has expanded to help with various projects (Love You Lots, renovating a house for unwed mothers, partnering with camping experiences with Generation One students and students involved in UBC sponsored off-campus missions activities, etc.). We are still in contact with Generation One regarding how to work with them in and beyond the Third Ward."

Reiff observed that it is incredulous that less than two miles from the Texas Medical Center – an area that has had so much money invested in it – is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country. "We don't have to go far to serve the least amongst us."

"The Third Ward can be rebuilt both spiritually and physically, but it will take the entire church in Houston working together to do so," asserted Malkemes. "Working together, we can lift Third Ward residents out of poverty and help them have better lives."