



Nehemiah

CLARK COUNTY'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

THE CASE FOR **Community** 2021



NEHEMIAH WOULD LIKE TO SAY A SPECIAL *thank you*

TO OUR SPONSORS OF THE 2ND ANNUAL CASE FOR COMMUNITY REPORT

The support we have received from these public and private sources allows us to research, collaborate and report on community transformation through this report and the first-ever Case for Community Summit to be held September 10, 2021 in downtown Springfield. We thank you for the investment - not only in these efforts - but in our community.



Mental Health & Recovery Board
of Clark, Greene & Madison Counties

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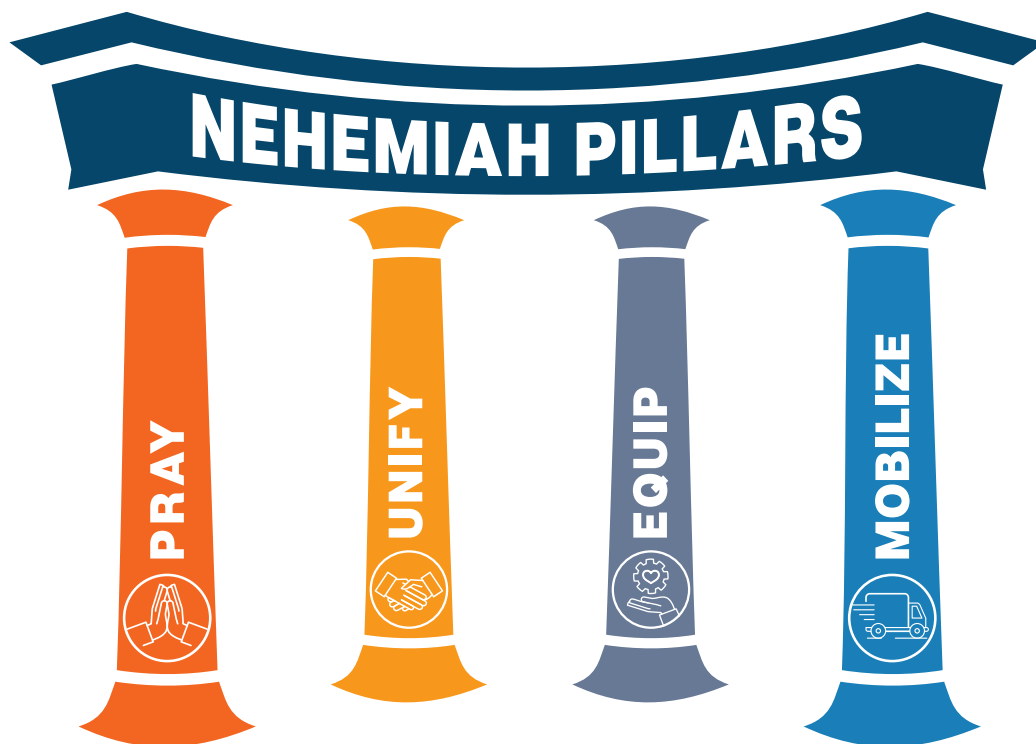
THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY

The biblical figure Nehemiah was instrumental in restoring the city of Jerusalem and rededicating its people to God. In the same way, our hope at The Nehemiah Foundation has been bringing healing and restoration to our city by uniting the Church around strategic ministry initiatives for over 25 years. At The Nehemiah Foundation, we envision Springfield and Clark County as a community where all people would know God's love for them.

Nehemiah provides a network for Christian churches and ministries to amplify their positive impact to build God's kingdom in Springfield and Clark County.



Common Concerns • Common Ground • Common Impact



Nehemiah

MINISTRY PARTNERS



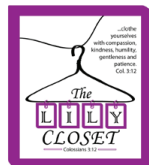
Interfaith Hospitality Network



Springfield Soup Kitchen



AWAKENINGS
of Clark County



THE CASE AGAINST GLISTENING HOPE

By Amy Willmann, Executive Director

Since our first Nehemiah Case for Community Report was published in 2020, we have been asking ourselves some age-old questions - and some new ones, too!

Why DO some communities thrive, while others seem to get “stuck?” Is the concept of cultivating community transformation simply the empty wishes of the cock-eyed optimists among us? Is it even Biblical or responsible to think that we could “rise and build” - that we could express strategy, innovation and beauty - in the midst of our biggest challenges?

Maybe we should simply have more realistic expectations and set the bar lower? We could, after all, learn how to better cope with the stark realities around us. In our first Nehemiah Case for Community Report, we shared all of our most common concerns including the effects of poverty, the vulnerabilities our public schools face, addiction and mental health issues, the need for racial reconciliation, and the divisiveness among the Body of Christ. These grievous issues have not gone away in the past year. If anything, some have

deepened and we find ourselves exhausted. Caregivers, pastors, parents and leaders in every sector have had to pivot so many times we have lost count. The past 18 months or more have been weighty and challenging indeed.

Certainly, we are holding things in tension: coping strategies, how-to's, and gritty next-steps are so practical and often the most prudent approach to helping people who are the most vulnerable in our midst. In fact, I believe the church needs to “do no harm” and learn to be content to show up as an empathic presence and simply learn how “to companion.” We need to devote ourselves to showing up authentically to just be with people, with no pressure for them to prove to us that they feel better as a result of our intervention. Sometimes the best thing for all of us is to not even think about “fixing” people, places, and things, but simply learning to demonstrate empathy, patience and wisdom. This often requires us to abandon outcomes and the results we often become addicted and attached to.

On the other hand...

One of our most passionate motivations in publishing a Case for Community Report: 2021 edition is to press even more into big-picture, macro-, kingdom-of-God solutions and strategies for community transformation! We believe what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 3:10 is as true today as it was back when he wrote it. Truly God wants to:

“...use the church to display his wisdom in rich variety...”

- Ephesians 3:10 (NLT)

We believe that understanding where we are is essential, and yet if we are not careful, the statistics and stories can just wave a hopeless banner and depressing news reel over our heads and hearts. People are suffering, People are divided. And the Body of Christ doesn't always rise to the occasion to model unity, healing and hope.

BUT PLEASE LOOK CLOSER.

We want to dive deeper into understanding that leads to deeper impact and transformation.





We know that when King Solomon prayed for wisdom, God generously poured it out upon him, and the city of Jerusalem became a beacon of hope to the surrounding region. People came from miles around to ask “how did you do it?” I don’t know about you, but I have heard of modern day examples of community and regional transformation! So, why not Springfield? Honestly, I do love to imagine Springfield becoming a destination spot for people who want to see how we have not only shown resilience, but how we have solved intense problems.

We know that as children of God, as sons and daughters made in His image, we are certainly hard-wired with the right stuff - we can ask ourselves “what beautiful things do we want to create together out of the chaos around us?”

OUR OLD STORY AND OUR NEW STORY

As the fourth leader of this beloved organization, I am quite aware of those who have come before me. I knew every single one of the former Executive Directors. Wally Martinson, the founder of The Nehemiah Foundation, used to rollerblade past my house with his family when our daughters were in Kindergarten together. I’ve admired Wally and his wife, Anne, ever since! Shelley

Lopez remains a dear friend and mentor in many ways, and I was greatly impacted by her leadership as I led one of the local non-profits ministries while she was at Nehemiah. And then Casey Cockerham came to us and brought timely courage, strategic questions and insight which led us to the present day. Here I am, holding each of these amazing leaders in high regard and much holy affection.

I love the Nehemiah story. I love the beautiful tapestry of supporting over 25 faith-based non-profits over 25 years! I daydream about returning to the level of generosity that Nehemiah was able to provide to ministries in the way of Ministry Partner Grants back in the day. We will gladly receive any and all donations and support that will help us re-establish and even improve those grant processes and programs. I also love the solid and healthy foundation that these leaders laid for amazing leadership development, ministry and church networking and unifying efforts. We also know that God is leading us into the next 25 years with some brand new courage as well.

If you are wondering what we’re doing next, that remains to be seen in some ways. We have our ears inclined to heaven, and we would love to hear from you! But you can be certain that we will be *listening, learning, leaning in, lamenting, and leaving a LEGACY* for our children’s children.

INTRODUCING NEHEMIAH'S PATHWAYS

FLOURISHING NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

Christian Community Development



Cultivating
Reconciliation


UNIFIED
worship collective

Compassion
and Courage:
Mental Health &
the Church

Christian
Community
Development
Projects



FAITH COMMUNITY CRISIS-RESPONSE TEAM INITIATIVE

Collaboration in the Midst of Crisis

Interfaith
Response



Trauma-
informed
collaboration

Coordinating
volunteers and
deeds



Last year – in an effort to make Nehemiah’s mission and purpose more clear and impactful – we introduced four action “Pillars.” These verbs – Pray, Unify, Equip and Mobilize – demonstrate HOW we take action on our mission in the community. This year, we want to take that action farther by introducing four distinct “Pathways” that will help drive outcomes related to community transformation. These tangible

pathways are Nehemiah initiatives around which we can engage, collaborate, serve and lead in a way only Clark County’s Christian Community can do. Throughout this report, you will see ways these initiatives and their components are beginning to come to life at Nehemiah. Please join us on our journey to community transformation.

STREAMLINE INITIATIVE

Blessing Kids through Church-School Partnerships



Mentoring Collaborative



CarePortal

Equipping churches for impactful giving and volunteering



RISE & BUILD INFLUENCE INITIATIVE

Christian Leadership Development

Transformational leadership coaching



S.O.U.L. Talks

New ministry “Launchpad”

Ministry Partner grants

BECOMING A *flourishing* COMMUNITY

TWO PERSPECTIVES, ONE MISSION: COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Vibrant. Sustainable. Regenerative. Flourishing. No matter what you call it, a community in transformation represents the heart and soul of its citizens, and good communities embrace many different approaches to take root, bloom and bear fruit.

Nehemiah is in a unique position to participate in and lead community transformation from a Christian point of view. Other leaders and organizations in the community are heavily invested in transformation, including private businesses, individuals and government and civic organizations. In the case of government entities,

their mandated responsibilities include providing infrastructure, services and support for taxpayers, families and jobseekers, developing the economy, and sometimes responding to crises. While the charges and approaches are different, there is much to be gained by coordinating our responses and collaborating with one another to bring about real change.

We sat down with Amy Willmann, Nehemiah Executive Director and Melanie Flax Wilt, Clark County Commissioner, to explore what it means to be a “flourishing community” from two seemingly different points of view:



Why is the term “Flourishing Community” ideal for this Nehemiah initiative?

Amy: It seems like a natural next step for us as an organization to lean even more into synthesizing and strategizing at a Christian Community Development and Engagement level - and “flourishing” is one of my current favorite words that captures all that we can mean by that! As God provides wisdom from heaven, we can move into even greater levels of prevention and strategic solutions for our most grievous problems, resulting in holistic flourishing - wellness and wholeness that blesses every person in our community.

Melanie: I go back to my roots in agriculture and think about the need to nourish what you grow through healthy soil, providing water and all the elements essential for life. These essentials allow the plant to thrive even when there are days or weeks of drought, floods or disease. It seems appropriate that we need essentials like love, unity, harmony and joy to make our community grow despite harsh conditions.

What does it mean to flourish as a community?

Amy: Along with my crush on the word flourishing, I love the Hebrew word Shalom. Shalom denotes a level of wholeness, multi-faceted peace, completeness, where nothing is lacking and no one is left out. I long for this “shalom-level” of flourishing in our midst - big-picture community transformation that leads to everyone being blessed, everyone having what they need, everyone being impacted by giving and receiving God’s wrap-around care. I believe this includes responding to crises and the needs of others with immediate practical relief, compassion - hope and healing! But it also means developing macro-/big-picture strategies for prevention and innovative solutions that result in sustainable and profound transformation.

Melanie: It means coming together to grow. This is not an individual endeavor but one that takes all members of the community and will be enjoyed by all of us when we do indeed flourish.

In what ways are Springfield and Clark County already flourishing today?

Amy: When Bruce and I moved here 22 years ago, we were astounded by the sheer number of organizations, churches, and ministries who were woven together so beautifully underneath the Nehemiah Foundation, and in other organic and unofficial ways too! Also, forward-thinking problem-solvers, dreamers, risk-takers - they seemed to be around every corner! Over the years, we have been able to watch this kind of culture and attitude blossom, and it has taken shape: new businesses, a revitalized downtown, new churches and ministries, new levels of collaboration among agencies, and more. I am sensing a general tone of willingness, open-mindedness, a readiness to collaborate in the truest sense of the word - not just in theory, but in innovative, courageous, vibrant, and authentic ways.

Melanie: It’s amazing to look back on the Springfield and Clark County of my childhood and compare that to what I see today. Downtown was a shell during the 90s, and today it’s a hub of activity. Manufacturing plants were closing, and today they’re opening up with hundreds

of good-paying jobs. Opportunities for families and individuals are everywhere. Not only in business, but we have new housing options like downtown living that weren’t even thought of thirty years ago.

What’s keeping us back from flourishing today?

Amy: First of all, I think we can all struggle on an individual level to truly prefer others above ourselves. The kind of wholeness and flourishing we are aiming for is a love-on-steroids, good news-on-display that is honestly just not an easy way to live. Secondly, this level of wholeness, consisting of both prevention and complex solutions, requires so much humility and a culture of honor among all of the organizations, leaders, caregivers, and problem-solvers in our midst. We must first humbly listen to, acknowledge, and care for the most at-risk and vulnerable among us. But we must also humble ourselves as leaders and “problem-solvers” to one another. We have to admit we can’t do it all! It can be difficult for each of us in our own silos to humble ourselves to the genius and innovative solutions that someone ELSE brings to the table.





Melanie: I don't think economic factors hold us back as much as our inability to work together through difficult changes. Some people embrace change, while others resist it, and we have to recognize that we all come at these things differently. Giving people the "benefit of the doubt" is an uncommon occurrence but would allow us to focus on issues and identify solutions without allowing our egos to get in the way. After all, it's not about us, it's about the community that will be here long after our days on Earth are through.

How do we apply spiritual, governmental and clinical solutions to help us flourish?

Amy: Sometime in the past few years, I invented my own little phrase - "holy hybrid" - just for this topic. After spending years in Christian ministry, education, and faith-based/trauma-informed non-profit work, I have developed a high level of respect and honor for the traditions, methods, models, and perspectives of those who are approaching the most grievous issues in our community in ways that are different from mine. This high value for people who are different from us - people who look differently, worship differently, live differently - is something that I believe can lead us into great wisdom as we seek to bring wholeness, healing, and hope to our community. I do not believe this requires us to abandon our own traditions, beliefs, or unique identity and culture.

Instead, I believe we can consider the best practices of other spheres of influence, and use discernment and wisdom regarding incorporating those approaches into our faith-based ministries or not. I am hoping and praying that more and more government and clinical approaches to community health will consider all that the faith-based approach can bring to the table as well! This level of cross-pollination and best-practice-sharing can help create the humility and breakthrough that we all need.

Melanie: No single entity or individual has all the answers. We witnessed during the pandemic that homelessness was becoming a greater challenge than ever in Springfield. It took county and city leaders, church leaders and parishioners, non-profit leaders and staff, private businesses, and a host of volunteers to provide food and shelter, transitional opportunities, and hope for these families and individuals who needed a hand up.

After all, it's not about us, it's about the community that will be here long after our days on Earth are through.

REVITALIZING HOUSING

Provides Opportunities for Families and Businesses

By Bryan Heck

The issue of housing has emerged as one of the top priority issues facing Springfield over the course of the last two years. This has been driven by the lack of housing opportunities in our community across all spectrums, from affordable housing to high-end housing from rental units to owner occupied units. As the Springfield community looks to grow and attract new jobs to our area, we must also look to address the availability of all housing opportunity types in our market. This is because without increasing our housing options, we will not be able to grow our population, which negatively impacts our ability to create job growth as employers are dependent upon a strong and robust workforce, as companies seek out growing communities.

Springfield has not sat idle in our quest to address our housing issues through the community. In 2018, a Housing Consortium of public and private partners formed to start analyzing the issues impacting housing in our community. Mayor Warren Copeland, City Commissioner Dave Estrop, and President of Park National Bank John Brown spearheaded this group's efforts to initiate long-needed changes affecting various housing issues that were stunting growth in and around Springfield.

Two studies were commissioned by the consortium using both public and private funds to receive expert advice and recommendations on what could be done to move the needle. The





As the Springfield community looks to grow and attract new jobs to our area, we must also look to address the availability of all housing opportunity types in our market.

Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) was contracted to complete a Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis. This analysis would look at the macro level of our housing market and make recommendations to policies and programs that could lead to revitalization of existing housing, as well as, construction of new housing in Springfield. Urban Fast Forward was contracted at the same time to develop a more micro level analysis of a specific area of neighborhoods located just south of our downtown. This approach, known as engaged neighborhood planning, was seen as an opportunity to induce public participation and outreach in an effort to revitalize existing legacy neighborhoods throughout Springfield. The goal of the consortium was that this effort could be replicated in other neighborhoods throughout our community, with the end goal of developing a micro level plan for redevelopment of all legacy neighborhoods in Springfield.

The GOPC analysis was completed in June of 2019 and the consortium, along with the City Commission began implementing recommendations laid out in the analysis. One of the major policy recommendations led to the establishment of the Vacant Property Registry, which sought to hold property owners accountable for vacant structures located throughout the community, most of which impacted Springfield's legacy neighborhoods. To date, over 400 properties have been registered, with many having either been sold and revitalized, or plans put in place for the investments necessary to put the structures back into productive use. The Engaged Neighborhood Plan was completed in the fall of 2019 providing recommendations for improvements to the targeted neighborhoods just south of downtown. Despite COVID-19, progress has been made in advancing the recommendations of the planning effort forward. In addition, Urban Fast Forward was contracted to continue their efforts by shifting west and expanding the engaged neighborhood planning efforts to incorporate additional legacy neighborhoods. Both the

first and second Engaged Neighborhood Plans have included extensive public outreach and input, which is vital to the success of each effort.

This is just a glimpse at the many efforts that are underway in addressing one of the number one priority issues facing our community. The success of these efforts is only possible through the

collaboration and cooperation of not only the entities directly involved, but the community as a whole as we work to move Springfield forward together.

RECONCILIATION: It's Complicated

By Eli Williams, Urban Light Ministries

Reconciliation is defined as: bringing again into unity, harmony or agreement what has been alienated.

An African American Christian asked the question “How can white and black Americans reconcile when there has never been unity and harmony between us?” In other words, he was asking “Since from the beginning of the white Church in this country, there has been intentional segregation, discrimination, bigotry and hatred for slaves and their descendants, how can one speak of bringing again unity and harmony to American Christianity?” That is an excellent question. It demands an answer.

The answer? It's very complicated.

I have come to believe that in order to have fruitful conversations about racial reconciliation, we have to go all the way back to the beginning

of humanity, not the United States. God created one man and one woman. In keeping with the Creator's plan for populating the earth, Adam and Eve had children. Their children, in turn, throughout the ages produced a beautiful variety of offspring. All the different variations of skin, eye and hair colors proliferated. Just as in plant life, geography and all animal life, there is great diversity in the human race.

Because of the rebellion of Adam, throughout human history, man has perpetuated of all kinds of depravity, including slavery. To justify inhumane treatment of their brothers and sisters, people in power foisted various lies about human origins upon the world. In science, the theory of evolution; in socio-politics, the doctrine of manifest destiny, white supremacy and other untruths validated their ungodly behavior. In early America, in Christian religion, the so-called curse of Ham gave Biblical



ON BUILDING UNITY

Understand: Building genuine cross-racial relationships takes significant commitment and time.

- Building unity is spiritual warfare. That is why it is so difficult. (1 Corinthians 10:4-5; Ephesians 6:10-11)
- The enemy does not want us unified, because it is a powerful witness to the power of Christ. (John 13:35)
 - This why Jesus prayed for us to be one. (John 17:20-26)
- To hear another person's heart, one must be patient. (James 1:19-22)

FIRST STEPS

Build cross-racial relationships

- Regularly spend time together (Hebrews 10:25)
- Pray together (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- Learn to truly love one another (1 John 4:7-8)
- Make a significant sacrificial commitment to the relationships (John 13:34-35)
- Learn to appreciate and value the others' cultures and histories (Philippians 2:3)

Learn together, and from each other

- Do a book study together
Suggestions:
 - One Race by Ken Ham and Charles Ware
 - Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility by George Yancey
 - Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife by Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein
- Do ministry project(s) together
- Get to know each other's families, visiting in each other's homes
- Attend each other's churches

Suggestions for Conversations

- Ask hard questions and answer hard questions
 - Stay at the table when it becomes uncomfortable
 - Keep coming back to the table
 - When appropriate, ask for forgiveness
 - Extend forgiveness
- Celebrate progress regularly

cover for Church leaders who wanted to preach the gospel to their slaves to make them docile, while also justifying the practice of denying their Christian equality. Black Christians were not welcome in white churches, or were required to sit in the balcony or other separate areas. They were denied leadership roles and full status as members. The establishment of black congregations was the result.

In their own fellowships, black Christians were able to serve in every capacity and develop their own Christian education programs and styles of worship. Black churches became the centers of communities. They are where black businesses found support, and where the poor found assistance. Those churches were essential to the growth of the civil rights movement, and the establishment of black church denominations, colleges, and a plethora of social and civic organizations.

Whereas, historically black churches have been theologically and politically conservative, it has been liberal white churches that have been the most supportive of black advancement. Therefore, an uneasy sort of alliance exists. For example, all my black Christian friends are pro-life, but lean liberal when it comes to issues like voting rights and police reform.

Therefore, I believe any conversation about race, equality and common Christian values must start with an acknowledgment of these dynamics. We will disagree, but in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in everything else, love.



FAITH COMMUNITY NURSING & HEALTH MINISTRY PROGRAM

Through grant funds received from the Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation and a collaborative partnership between Mercy Health and Clark County Combined Health District, Faith Community Nursing & Health Ministry Program has begun its pilot in Springfield. Five churches in the area nearest to the “Engaged Neighborhood” were identified and approached to gauge their interest in being involved with the pilot and have accepted! (The “Engaged Neighborhood” was identified by The City of Springfield’s Housing study as an area of community focus, investment, activity and collaboration, with initial parameters being Pleasant to Perrin, S. Limestone to S. Yellow Springs Street.)

Over the last 8 months Program Coordinator, Tina LeFaive, has worked collaboratively with the churches, their parishioners, and church leadership to identify appropriate candidates who could be a Faith Community Nurse or Health Minister. These identified individuals will receive additional training through the grant to provide additional health care supports, navigation and capacity directly within the faith community. Tina has also assisted in supporting congregational assessments (which are still underway), as well as facilitating introductions to local Non-Profits, Health and Safety Agencies, Advocates (like

Fire Chief Brian Miller who is presently doing in-person visits to each congregation) and more! We are hopeful the Faith Community Nursing & Health Minister program will continue to grow in Springfield and are actively working to make this possible.

In conjunction, Mercy has been working closely with Miller to explore the capability of launching a Springfield Paramedicine program. Through grant funds received from The Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation, Initial investment has been made in technology resources that will allow Mercy’s Emergency Department to better speak to and integrate with Springfield Fire & EMS as they are in the community managing the special needs of treating and transporting patients. We are in the early stages of this development but are encouraged through the doors the Holy Spirit opens for us and the relationships being built.

Please pray for Mercy Health-Springfield, the Faith Community Nursing & Health Ministry Program as well as our program partners in these five local churches, Clark County Combined Health District and Springfield Fire & EMS as we pursue good help, mercy and excellent care for the needs of our community.



The Faith-Community CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

MANIFOLD WISDOM FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

By Amy Willmann

Here at the Nehemiah Foundation, we believe that “the manifold wisdom of God” can indeed be made known through the church. Maybe we have even witnessed this first-hand in various times throughout history and maybe even once in each of our lifetimes – the church being all that the church was created to be. Trusted. Reliable. Wise. Credible. Full of strategies and blueprints from heaven to help bring calm in the midst of chaos. The very Body of Christ, a collective “mind of Christ,” bringing inspired solutions when the natural wisdom of the most brilliant men and women just isn’t enough.

But we have also been caught off guard. We have experienced seasons in which our very best is still not good enough. We have seen the statistics soar and spirits plummet. And we have been left with way more questions than answers.

We have all had to admit that 2020 brought challenges for which none of us were prepared.

The church was especially not prepared for a 350% spike in the number of unsheltered among us. We were not prepared to pivot into new ways of caring for the most at-risk among us. We did not know how to most effectively support the agencies, staff, and most of all, the displaced and unsheltered. We were not prepared to respond in the most cohesive and consistent and coherent ways.

In spite of that, God’s “very present help in times of trouble,” his healing, and his comfort were expressed through His church every single day. People of different faith backgrounds (or no faith background) fed, clothed, warmed and served in every way possible. The most devastated in our community witnessed a great outpouring of love and compassion, even if it was not perfect.

There is not enough space here to name every organization, every church, every faith-community, every non-profit, every business, every government agency, every first responder, and every individual who stepped up and showed up. It was breathtaking.

MOVING FORWARD

In some ways, it truly is okay to admit that we can never be fully prepared for emergencies and crisis – since they are, by very nature, unexpected and unplanned. On the other hand, we are determined to learn, to become all that God intended when he declared that his “manifold wisdom” would flow directly through his church into a dark and chaotic world.

The sheer lack of affordable housing, our profound increase in the number of unsheltered teens, children, families, and single men and women is simply devastating and unacceptable. We are praying for God’s very presence to rest upon us as we gather people of faith to respond to this need in the most honoring and effective ways.



FAITH-COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM -

a Nehemiah initiative focused on strategic approaches and tactical response in the case of local emergencies. This task force will bring “faith to the table” to work alongside government and social services agencies to create coordinated efforts during times of crisis. With renewed passion and focus on prevention, innovative and big-picture solutions, and even more equipped mercy ministries, programs, and volunteers, Nehemiah will help mobilize and coordinate a unified response among churches and other service organizations.

We are asking God for his increased wisdom, favor, provision and protection as we move more sturdily into this Crisis Response Team (CRT). Our newly-named 2021 “Faith-Community Crisis Response Team” will be tasked with collaborating with community leaders in every sector - government, social services, mental health, public health, business, etc. in order to more effectively address prevention and long-term solutions to our most grievous and systemic problems. We are truly honored that local leaders are reaching across aisles and coming out of silos, asking the faith community to come to the table for these kinds of strategic discussions. Yes, the church is famous for our ability to mobilize volunteers, feed the hungry, and care for the most vulnerable among us. However, it seems that the time is just right for the people of God to become even more deeply involved in the wise talks that are happening in our community. What an honor to be invited, to be trusted, to be considered an integral part of the strategy-seeking conversations. Please be praying for us, and let us know if you would like to join the CRT!

We are encouraged by the movement, the momentum, and the monumental willingness that we see. The willingness to admit that we can do better. The willingness to come out of our silos and collaborate like never before. The willingness to serve alongside people who are different from us in order to get the job done more effectively and more expediently.



In the early winter of 2020, several of our city government leaders called upon the faith community to form a new collaborative effort and respond to the severe spike in number of unsheltered individuals and families in our community. Dr. Carl Ruby, the Pastor of Central Christian Church, and Pastor Eli Williams, Executive Director of Urban Light Ministries and Associate Pastor at New Hope Church, stepped forward to help coordinate these efforts in the faith community. The goal was to create more intentional and proactive systems for communication and mobilization of various congregations and organizations.

The team was formed, and throughout the winter months, dozens of local pastors and ministry leaders began to discuss the best practices for response and possible strategies for the future. Meanwhile, The Nehemiah Foundation was asked to join the Clark County Emergency Management Agency meetings, in order to help create clearer communication pathways for getting people of faith mobilized to help in effective and specific ways. Nehemiah also collaborated with community leaders from The United Way and local churches in order to compile an up-to-date list of hot meals and pantries in the community, during a time when those details were quite fluid. Warming Centers popped up when temperatures dropped to dangerously low numbers.

In all of this, local faith leaders began to grapple with the most difficult questions – how can we streamline processes? be more effective? Communicate more efficiently? Engage more churches and individuals? Inspire more people to get involved in strategic solutions and crisis-response? How can we make sure we are “helping without hurting” and building bridges out of poverty even in the midst of a whirlwind of triage and what felt like “emergency mode?” These challenges and questions will be at the forefront of the conversation as the new Nehemiah Faith-Community Crisis Response Team Initiative solidifies.

Congratulations to Nehemiah Ministry Partner - Fred Stegner of the Springfield Soup Kitchen - the 2021 recipient of the Sara T. Landess Community Spirit Award. We are grateful for all the ways that The Springfield Soup Kitchen helped serve the most vulnerable among us during such a challenging season.

LOCAL FAITH LEADERS RESPOND TO INJUSTICE

By: Rev. Carl Ruby, Central Christian Church and Rev. Adam Banks, First Baptist Church

In what would come to be known as his inaugural address, Jesus unrolled a scroll until he reached Isaiah 61. Quoting the great prophet Isaiah, Jesus laid out the priorities of his earthly ministry, announcing:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the
Lord’s favor.”**

Then he rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant and took his seat.

But he wasn’t finished. He didn’t just let the words hang there leaving people to wonder why he chose this passage. He continued, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

From the start, Jesus demonstrated his concern for issues that continue to challenge cities like Springfield. Human flourishing and the common good mattered to Jesus and they must matter to us.

There is a fresh spirit of revitalization sweeping through Springfield, often led by people of faith, that reflects the words of Isaiah 61:4-5;



**They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long
devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for
generations.
Strangers will shepherd your flocks;
foreigners will work your fields and
vineyards.**

It has been said that one measure of a city's strength is the degree to which its most vulnerable members can prosper, and for over 27 years The Nehemiah Foundation has been committed to that objective, providing opportunities for all members of our community to flourish. As pastors of congregations that meet to worship at both ends of town, we see the value of community wide participation in this goal. The challenges facing us are too big for any one church or organization to handle alone, but through the kind of collaboration encouraged by The Nehemiah Foundation, we're able to achieve far greater than we ever could as individuals.

The past year has been a difficult one across our nation, particularly for our cities. Images of rioting and destruction have been too common on the nightly news, yet this should not discourage followers of Jesus. Where others see cause for despair we see opportunities for service. Following the murder of George Floyd, local churches in Springfield marched through town sideby side with members of the Springfield City Police Department, the Clark County Sheriff's Office, the NAACP and Black Lives Matter.

As riots consumed some cities, here in Springfield, churches and community leaders met to quickly establish community advisory teams with minority representation to work with our Police Department and Sheriff's Office to ensure that all of our residents receive equal protection under the law. As pastors, both of us are now honored to serve on the Clark County Law Enforcement Advisory Team where we talk through tough issues that cause some communities to splinter.

There have been, and likely will continue to be, more difficult cases to arise since the murder of George Floyd, which require sensitivity and tact in the way justice is sought for all parties involved. The advisory teams for the city and the county have responded by releasing statements addressing these situations. However, it is the goal of the Clark County Law Enforcement Advisory Team and the Springfield Police Advisory Teams to proactively prevent future tragedies from occurring.



The challenge is great, but through collaborative efforts between the law enforcement agencies and the advisory teams, we optimistically cooperate recognizing progress is possible only through partnership.

As the body of Christ continues to work together, may the words of Isaiah 61:9 be as true in Springfield as they were in ancient Israel, "All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed."

THE NEHEMIAH STREAMLINE INITIATIVE

Why do schools and churches need each other?

By Sara Dixon

In the fall of 1985, I began my first teaching job in the public education system as a high school English teacher at an inner-city high school in Dallas, Texas. I quickly realized on my first day at Roosevelt High School in South Oak Cliff that I was terribly unprepared for the task ahead of me.

I can vividly remember the face of a sweet, quiet student in my freshman English class. Despite being there every day and sitting attentively in the front row, this precious student struggled to read and was failing all of her classes. As I began to get to know her I learned that even though she was only 14 years old, she was the mother of twin babies! Her life story shocked me. My role was to teach her literature and writing. But she had so many other things going on in her life that were major barriers to her learning, I did not know how she and her little babies were ever going to make it.

Soon I became overwhelmed with the knowledge that many of my students came from hard places and were facing similar challenges. My heart was full of compassion, and I worked really hard as their teacher. But I clearly did not have the knowledge or tools that I needed to support and empower my students in ways that would have a meaningful impact in their lives. I came away from that first year feeling a failure.

In the years since, I have thought often about that teaching experience. And I have seen a similar scenario play out again and again as I have worked with schools, churches and community-based organizations in high poverty communities. All around us are students with stories similar to my students in Dallas who had so much to overcome.

As followers of Jesus, we look out at the needs of vulnerable kids with willing hearts to serve. We want to help. But just as I felt in my first classroom, we don't always know how to help in ways that have long lasting and positive impact.

At the same time, our local schools carry a tremendous burden of trying to meet academic needs in addition to all of the social, emotional and physical needs of their students. They need support from the community, including the Christian community, but they don't always know how to access it.

In a recent conversation, a member of the Springfield City School District leadership team was asked how the Christian community could help support our local schools. Her answer was, ***“we need streamlined processes for accessing the resources that churches can provide.”***





BRIDGING THE GAP

Nehemiah wants to help to bridge these gaps in Clark County. In the coming months, Nehemiah will be giving focused attention to nurturing church-school partnerships that will bless kids. Through the Nehemiah Streamline Initiative, our goal will be to facilitate streamlined processes of connecting the Christian community to our local schools.

Where are the vulnerable kids in our community? They are in our schools.

Where are our schools? They are at the center of our neighborhoods.

Local public schools provide the means for Christians to fruitfully engage our community like no other. By coming alongside schools to help carry their heavy burden of caring for vulnerable students, we have an opportunity to model God's sacrificial love to a hurting world and to see our community transformed.

What does this look like? ***It looks like a community connected through caring relationships...*** a local church caring for a school staff in their neighborhood, pastors and principals encouraging one another, mentors spending time one on one with students who need a friend, out of school time enrichment activities, or opportunities for families and neighbors to build relationships and walk alongside each other through life happenings.

Whatever form it takes, ***we envision a community where every public school is lovingly and effectively supported by a local church and where every student in need is nurtured through loving and caring relationships.***

When a church ministers to a school, it ministers to an entire community and fulfills its calling in Matthew 22:37-39 to love God and to love our neighbors. When we, in Jesus' name, invest in the life of a student, a family or a school staff person, that investment matures over time and results in long-term benefits for everyone. And ultimately, God is glorified.

Did you know?

DID YOU KNOW... that there has been increasing pressure from federal and state government regulations for schools to provide things far beyond what schools used to be responsible for? Schools now have the responsibility of meeting not only the educational needs of children, but the social, emotional and physical needs as well.

DID YOU KNOW... in Springfield City Schools, in the year before the pandemic, there were 449 students who experienced homelessness? 66 of those were youth who were totally living on their own.

DID YOU KNOW... there are a large number of grandparents and older family members raising their grandchildren due to their parents struggling with substance abuse?

DID YOU KNOW... that over 59.9% of kids in Springfield are living in homes with a single parent?

What if...?

WHAT IF... every local school in our community had a church partner to pray for them and to provide the school staff with encouragement and support?

WHAT IF... our churches had a coordinated and empowering way to support families in providing some of the basic physical needs that kids in our schools are facing?

WHAT IF... every child in need was supported by a consistent and caring relationship with an adult in our community?

WHAT IF... every child in our schools had someone praying for them by name?

WHAT IF... every follower of Jesus in Clark County was mobilized and equipped to meaningfully and effectively walk alongside a child, a parent, a teacher or a principal in their neighborhood to help them become all that God created them to be?

The Nehemiah's Streamline Initiative is asking God to make these "what if" statements become a reality.



THE MISSION IN ACTION...

Lagonda Elementary and SpringHill Church together blessing kids.

Lagonda Elementary School Principal, Joshua Harning, explains why church-school partnerships are so important when he shares that, "School used to be a community-based organization that brought families together for the betterment of students. However, in my opinion, that sense of community has been lost across the educational realm in this country. We are fortunate to be in a district that encourages our staff and leadership to rebuild those connections and regain that sense of community. The local church is one of the few organizations in our community that comes together for the betterment of groups and individuals."

By making a bridge between churches and schools such as SpringHill Church and Lagonda Elementary, we try to recapture the stability, support and sense of belonging that students have when they are at school and give them every opportunity to grow into a well-rounded individual and reach their personal goals!"

Several years ago, SpringHill began a partnership with Lagonda Elementary through a KidsHope USA mentoring program because they wanted to serve families in their neighborhood and they knew that mentoring can be powerfully used to impact lives for the better. Kids need to know that they are unique, important and special. They need to know they matter, and that they're known personally by caring adults in their neighborhood.

Anne Martinson, SpringHill's KidsHope Director, says that the mentoring program helped open the eyes of their church to further needs and ways that the church could serve Lagonda Elementary. She said, "we also realized how challenging teaching is in today's world, and how hammered our school staffs can be, so we want to support them and let them know that we value them."

This church-school partnership has continued to grow beyond mentoring and support of the school staff. It also provides out-of-school-time academic support and enrichment activities, family engagement activities and opportunities for the neighborhood to come together just to build friendships.

God is doing exciting things in the Lagonda neighborhood that is blessing kids, lifting up a local school and mobilizing a church body. Through the Streamline Initiative, Nehemiah is praying that God will use us to ensure that every school and every local church can get in on what He is doing.

"I think many non-churchgoers have distorted views of God and people who attend churches," said Anne. "I'd love to break down the barriers that keep people from seeing God and His people clearly. The Church is the largest army never fully deployed – there is so much yet-untapped potential in her ranks! I want Christians to know that mentoring kids and supporting their local school is something anyone can do."

"Mentoring and loving on our local school is a good way of loving on Jesus. He sees and values what we do for His name and glory!"

NEHEMIAH RECEIVES GOVERNMENT GRANT TO IMPLEMENT CarePortal in Clark County

By Ashlie Discenza

The Nehemiah Foundation is now an implementing partner of CarePortal in Clark County. An implementing partner can use the platform to expand the church's mission and in this case, Nehemiah can now fulfill one of its four pathways, Nehemiah Streamline Initiative: Blessing Kids through Church School Partnerships. Nehemiah is set to embark on a county-wide effort to serve the most vulnerable kids in the community.

"Nehemiah has a beautiful history of serving vulnerable kids and families in their own community. CarePortal will enable them to partner with churches to make meaningful connections all throughout Clark County, strengthening and empowering families, and providing opportunities for churches to form meaningful relationships with their neighbors through acts of service," said Janelle Shelton, Care Portal Regional Director – North Central USA.

The CarePortal is a technology connecting platform that brings the needs of those within the community that are struggling or vulnerable to the attention of local churches and community members so they can do something about it. Churches can identify and submit needs within their own church and community as well as caseworkers at government child welfare agencies approved by CarePortal. They have served over 100,000 kids in communities across the nation.

Clark County now has a bridge for children in need and churches, and that is Nehemiah. By joining

the CarePortal, Nehemiah is making a conscious effort to prevent a child from entering foster care, make an adoptive placement or support a youth aging out of foster care.

Now that Nehemiah has acquired this grant, they have selected Tami Carter as the Nehemiah Streamline Initiative/Care Portal Director. Tami has previous experience in administrative work at Mount Mission School in Grundy, Virginia. Careportal will put Nehemiah's streamline initiative into effect by blessing kids through church-school partnerships.



TWO SECTORS, ONE GOAL: Fostering Mental Health Support



By Greta Mayer, PhD, Mental Health Recovery Board

Many sectors of the community are acutely aware of the significant economic and interpersonal traumatic burden experienced by individuals and families. Living through a pandemic is certainly linked with a growing collective awareness about how stressors contribute to the development of mental health and substance use concerns and increased levels of distress. Sadly, the crisis of suicide and overdose have increased over the last year in Springfield and Clark County. The numbers have gone up despite the investment of new resources through peer support, education, and telehealth treatment options. Developing and promoting mental health services alone will not solve these complex problems!

There is a pressing need to find new, practical ways for the faith community to work together with governmental groups and private care providers in a helpful way to heal bodies, minds, and spirits of our hurting community members.

Focusing on these complementary dimensions helps to envision a holistic approach to health and quality of life. This involves nurturing all aspects of ourselves—our thoughts, emotions, spirits, social relationships, and physical bodies. Both mental health and faith communities have methods to encourage healthy, resilient ways to cope and respond to adversity. However, each communities' methods may be unknown or uninformed by the other. A practical foundational



step forward would be to introduce local mental health and substance use leaders to church leaders. By doing so, each group could learn about common and differing perspectives, resources, and programs of the other. For example, MHRB contracts with over 14 service providers who serve Clark County residents regardless of income or ability to pay. Pathways to a variety of services and supports for youth and adults could be illuminated so that churches could familiarize themselves and develop relationships with key contacts.

Churches are symbols of hope, redemption, and refuge. As the community is struggling with mental health and substance use concerns, faith communities can play a large role in providing compassionate care, healing, and acceptance.

We know that stigma can be a barrier for individuals and their loved ones to acknowledge that one has a mental health condition, and that stigma interferes with seeking help. Negative beliefs, misconceptions, or attitudes toward people with mental health or substance use concerns are common. They also interfere with individuals' and families' ability to seek solace in a faith community for mental health conditions. According to psychiatrist Dr. Stephen Grcevich, stigma is one of the most common barriers he identifies to explain why churches need to develop specific ministries to meet the needs of children and families who have invisible, mental disabilities. Mental health problems are often hidden which is a contrast to disabilities that are intellectual, developmental, or physical.

God creates multiple ways for people to approach Him through mind, body, and spirit. In the same way, the church can provide multiple options for someone to connect with a church community to reduce isolation, fear, and loneliness. We're not all experts in everything and to some, topics around mental health and substance use can be uncomfortable. But, as faith leaders, there are many practical ways for congregations to promote positive mental health and create inclusive environments:

- **Talk openly about mental health and substance use concerns**
- **Pray for individuals with these concerns, their friends and family members**
- **Reference local resources like MHRB's 2021 Mental Health Month toolkit for tips about how to talk about mental health in a responsible way**
- **Preach about discernment for knowing when it's time to get help**



- **Keep online options in place for those who feel more comfortable participating virtually versus in person for worship, educational, and small group ministries**
- **Consider modifying physical spaces through architectural design to reduce stimulation**
- **Allow individuals and families to sit where they may arrive quietly and leave easily**
- **Consider hosting trainings and support groups led by professionals**
- **Share events that the congregation can attend, like the Case for Community Summit in September**

The mental health community needs the church to help create more inclusive, nurturing environments for community members with mental health and substance use concerns. And, the church needs governmental and private care partners who stand ready with practical resources to encourage a holistic approach to help-seeking—mind, body, and spirit.

BUILDING COMMUNITY LEADERS:

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS ARE TRANSFORMED LEADERS

Our community is immensely blessed to have some of the best pastors, ministry leaders and faithful Christian influencers within every industry and vocational niche. This is quite important, especially since we believe that flourishing communities are indeed filled with flourishing leaders.

But we also believe that each of these flourishing leaders are, first and foremost, flourishing individuals. Or, at least, we hope so!

A healthy dose of introspection, self-awareness and self-compassion is a great way for people of faith to lead by example. In fact, in so many ways, the Good News is put on display when leaders demonstrate what it looks like to show what God can do through a vessel who knows how to rest!

So, go ahead. Take this opportunity to conduct a little check-in with yourself as you read this article. How are you attending to your own wellness as you also work to address the most grievous issues in our community? As you grapple with all of the common concerns, are you able to determine any areas in which you may be neglecting yourself?

We simply cannot skip over this consideration. As people of faith, we have been issued a tall order - "love your neighbor as yourself." This biblical mandate, as well as the entire counsel of scripture, does seem to indicate that flourishing communities will consist of leaders and caregivers who know how to do both. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Love yourself. Love your neighbor. Rinse and Repeat.

- Is it possible that we are called to a balance of: sacrificial service AND a fierce devotion to biblical disciplines such as rest and sabbath?
- Do we truly believe that "fruitfulness comes from abiding?"
- Can we embrace the very idea that our little sack lunch of loaves and fish will always be enough?
- Can we accept and even embrace our limitations and our need for holistic soul care?
- Can we allow ourselves to be on the receiving end of God's comfort and care?
- Can we receive help and input from others without any shame or compulsion to overwork or carry the whole world on our shoulders?



The bottom line is this:

In order to become transformational leaders, we must first be transformed.

In what ways does your very own soul need to be attended to?

The more obvious and transformational paradigm shift – we must renew our minds regarding the very definition of leadership, dismantling even trace amounts of unhealthy celebrity culture and unhealthy paradigms of status, power, prestige, and self-importance. But we must ALSO dismantle our unhealthy perceptions of what it means to “lay down our lives” to serve others. If we are not careful, we will cave in to unhealthy habits and get out of balance in the opposite extreme. Instead of self-promotion, we may disregard ourselves completely.

Just think of the oxygen-mask-in-the-airplane analogy, and then live your entire life as if you matter too. Live your life as if the people you are serving are depending on you to take great care of yourself.

The people we are serving deserve leaders who are well-watered gardens. They deserve leaders who will destroy stigma by being vulnerable and courageous enough to ask for help when they need it. They deserve to see the gospel on display through people who allow Jesus to be the hero in all of the stories.

Join us at The Nehemiah Foundation as we press into this topic even more in the future.

Be on the lookout for next steps in:

- creating sacred space for individual prayer, silence, solitude and spiritual retreat
- workshops on soul care for caregivers
- “Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership” book club
- Social media content, such as articles or podcasts with influential Christian leaders



OUR FAVORITE RESOURCES

Soul Care for Leaders

Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry

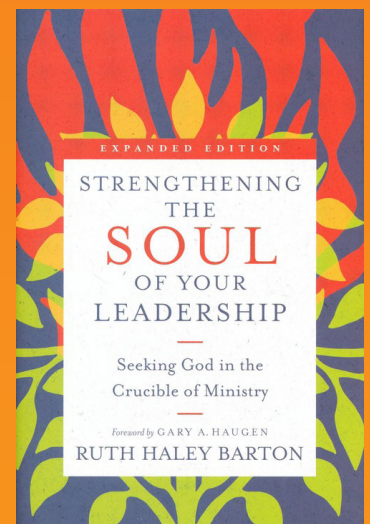
By Ruth Haley Barton

Soul Care for “I’m tired of helping others enjoy God: I just want to enjoy God for myself.” With this painful admission, Ruth Haley Barton invites us to an honest exploration of what happens when spiritual leaders lose track of their souls. Weaving together contemporary illustrations with penetrating insight from the life of Moses, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* explores topics such as

- responding to the dynamics of calling
- facing the loneliness of leadership
- leading from your authentic self
- cultivating spiritual community
- reenvisioning the promised land
- discerning God’s will together

Each chapter includes a spiritual practice to ensure your soul gets the nourishment it needs. Forging and maintaining a life-giving connection with God is the best choice you can make for yourself and for those you lead. This expanded edition includes the popular “How Is It with Your Soul?”

assessment for leaders and a flexible six- or twelve-week guided experience for groups.



SOUL CARE RESOURCES CONTINUED

Get Your Life Back: Everyday Practices for a World Gone Mad

By John Eldredge

A REFRESHINGLY SIMPLE GUIDE TO RECOVER YOUR LIFE! In *Get Your Life Back*, New York Times bestselling author John Eldredge provides a practical, simple, and refreshing guide to taking your life back.

By practicing a few wonderfully simple practices—or what John calls “graces”—you can begin to recover your soul, disentangle from the tragedies of this broken world, and discover the restorative power of beauty.

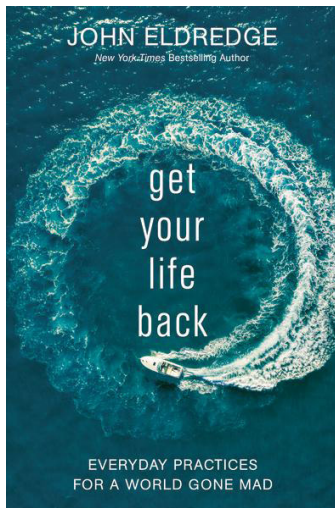
Ask yourself:

- Are you happy most of the time?
- Do you feel deeply loved?
- Are you excited about your future?
- How often do you feel lighthearted?

After reading this book you will...

- Learn how to insert the One Minute Pause into your day
- Begin practicing “benevolent detachment” and truly let it all go
- Offer kindness toward yourself in the choices you make
- Drink in the simple beauty available to you every day
- Take realistic steps to unplug from technology overload

These simple practices and others are ready for the taking. You don't need to abandon your life to get it back. Begin restoring your life here and now. Your soul will thank you for it.



The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World

By Pete Scazzero

Are you giving your all to be the best leader, but seemingly fall short?

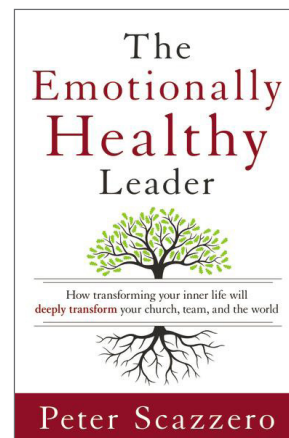
Bestselling author, pastor, and founder of New Life Fellowship Church Peter Scazzero offers useful advice on how to develop better Christian leadership skills.

In this book, the author will help readers improve their ability to manage stress and how to create a better community by developing a better relationship with Christ.

The *Emotionally Healthy Leader* offers proven strategies that have been tested and refined for nearly three decades. The methods presented in this book have helped Christian leaders worldwide in a variety of different situations.

Scazzero's approach uses practical and new ideas that are both insightful and profound. He describes his journey of discovering what it takes to be a good leader and explains the key pieces of healthy Christian leadership.

This valuable resource can not only act as a guide to better team building and improving management, but it can transform the way you view and inspire others.



PODCAST RECOMMENDATIONS:

SLINGSTONES • Dr. Terry Wardle
www.healingcare.org

THE EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADER
Pete Scazzero

STRENGTHENING THE SOUL OF YOUR LEADERSHIP
Ruth Haley Barton

THE BEING KNOWN PODCAST
Dr. Curt Thompson



RISE & BUILD

LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

Fall Leadership Breakfast

Honoring Local Civic and Church Leaders

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18

7:00-8:30 AM

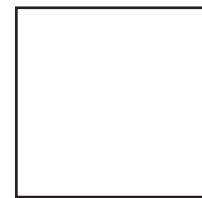
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church

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616 North Limestone Street
Springfield, OH 45503



Case for Community **SUMMIT**

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