

Multiplicity of Miracles

Rachel Thomson, 2015-16 NBA XPLOR Resident and Intern
Oakland Peace Center, an affiliate ministry of the NBA Incubate Initiative



I've heard that everyone gets one miracle in their life. And I think that's true, but it also seems to me that if people get one miracle, that places should get at least two, because the life span of places is so much longer than ours. 111 Fairmount Avenue in Oakland, California, happens to be one such place that has been allowed many miracles since its creation in 1929.

In earlier years, this massive Spanish Colonial was home of First Christian Church of Oakland. In 2007, the congregation felt the pull to be more – to utilize their space in pursuit of pleasing God and helping their community. There are many ways to please God, and even more ways to be a benefit to the community, but this congregation felt called to the work of peace, and realized that their most valuable asset in the work ahead could be their space. As rents skyrocket in Oakland and San Francisco, it is hard for nonprofits on a shoestring budget to be able to stay in the community to remain effective.

“What if we could give them a place to stay?” the congregation thought. “And what if we could find a way to help them combine their resources and energy for increased capacity?”
The Oakland Peace Center was born.

Flash forward five years, and the Oakland Peace Center, along with FCC Oakland, has 40 partners in peace, 12 of whom rent office space at affordable rates on the campus. The 12 in-house partners reached more than 80,000 people in 2015. As can be expected of an 87-year-old building that has always enjoyed a large population and heavy use, it is in need of repairs and updates, many of them major. That's where the miracles come in.

Miracle Days are familiar talk within the region. The first miracle was in 2005 when the building was still First Christian Church of Oakland. Then-Regional Minister Rev. Dr. Ben Bohren had implemented Miracle Days, a regional year-long process that culminated in a massive work day on a church in need.

The concept of Miracle Day was begun in 1998, created by Ben as part of a huge program of local church restoration and renewal through the National Benevolent Association of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. The idea came from the old Amish barn-raising tradition where everyone pitches in to get a big job done. As of 2016, there have been well over 60 Miracle Days all across the United States, with more than 15,000 people participating.

FCC Oakland was one of three Disciples of Christ churches in Northern California chosen for the first Miracle Day in the area, and a lot of great updates were made. But with the inhabitation of

many new organizations as part of the Oakland Peace Center, it soon became obvious that more updates were needed.

Additionally, there was great desire between the Oakland Peace Center and the regional church to solidify relations. The church wanted to find ways for congregants to move into a deeper relationship with the community.



Eula Pagdilao, 2015-16 NBA XPLOR Resident at the Northern California-Nevada Region, was put in charge of organizing another Miracle Day for the building, with the express purpose of building relationship between the church and local activists and nonprofits.

“Miracles begin with people,” Eula said. “People who envision changes. People who are willing to offer their time and their talent to plan to execute those changes. And people who help carry out that plan. Without these people, there is no miracle day; there is no miracle.”

While many times events seem to be planned and attended by specific groups, one of the lovely things about Miracle Day was that “people” got to mean people of faith, people of action, and everyone in between.

After months of fundraising and planning, on the morning of May 7, more than 70 people gathered in the old sanctuary for the worship that would open the day. After that, everyone went to work. We replaced stairs, installed new hardwood floors and a high-efficiency toilet, changed light bulbs, refreshed flower beds, added a wall, and refinished wood.

JustUs Kitchen, a local food activist organization, provided a delicious lunch, which was underwritten by Christian Church Homes, a longstanding Disciples health and social service ministry and another NBA XPLOR internship site. During the lunch break, Yani Davis from Disciples Seminary Foundation fired up the crowd with spiritually uplifting hip-hop.

Then everyone got back to work, and by the time the last crews left around 5:00 p.m., the building sparkled and shone. It was a miracle. The thing is though, it’s not about making a building look more professional, or function more efficiently. It’s about showing up.

“I loved the synergy of that day: social justice and service organizations got to witness the best of who the church is, and church folks got to work shoulder to shoulder with community groups they would not normally get to know,” said Rev. Sandhya Jha, executive director of Oakland Peace Center. “Months later, I saw two people who met at Miracle Day bump into each other again and ask how one another’s floor laying skills were holding up. That connection between people whose work together started that day and might blossom into even bigger things...to me, THAT’S the miracle.”

The church is at a crossroads, with many people turning from what they see as a toxic institution. And in the midst of that fog, there was the Northern California-Nevada Region of the Disciples of

Christ, who showed up and donated more than \$5,000—not just to support their fellow congregation, but to get behind the people in the community who are making a difference.

I grew up seeing church as a place of pretty words and no action, a place where the status quo was something to be held under any circumstances. So to see so many people showing up to support the community of the Oakland Peace Center was heart-warming.

This is what church can, and should, and in many cases does, look like. This is the miracle of the Oakland Peace Center.



The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at awatkins@nbacares.org.