

# Christianity and Social Work

*Readings on the Integration of  
Christian Faith and  
Social Work Practice*

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# Good Neighbor House: Reimagining Settlement Houses for 21st-Century Communities<sup>1</sup>

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Over the last several decades, a number of scholars and community leaders have lamented publicly the decline of community in American society (Carney, 2019; Cortright, 2015; Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wuthnow, 1998). Observers have noted that bonds of trust and reciprocity that once could be counted on to facilitate and strengthen social life in communities seem to be weakening and that the fabric of social life itself has begun to unravel in many communities (Cortright, 2015; Paxton, 1999; Putnam, 2000). Neighbors interact with one another less, trust each other less, and are less likely to collaborate to address community concerns than they were in the past. In addition to declining trust and social capital, communities must deal with issues related to increasing diversity and inter-group conflict, continuing economic and racial segregation, increasing economic inequality, a growing skepticism towards social institutions, and diminishing public resources. Such challenges pose a real threat to the health and well-being of many communities as well as the individuals and families that live in them. In this landscape of social disconnection and community estrangement, Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations have important contributions to make.

Christian faith emphasizes the values of stewardship, responsibility for the wider community, and hospitality to neighbor and stranger, all of which may be important antidotes to current trends in community life. Still, Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations must be prepared to draw from and utilize a variety of practice models and strategies in their work. Contemporary approaches to community development, organizing, and social action abound and provide invaluable direction in this regard (Gamble and Weil, 2009; Weil, Reisch, & Ohmer, 2012). In this article, we highlight a unique model for empowering community residents and building social capital, one that draws on the roots of the social work profession itself: the settlement house. Settlement houses, proliferating at the turn of the 20th century, combatted challenges in urban communities that were similar, in some regards, to the challenges communities face today (e.g., low levels of trust, intergroup conflict, increasing segregation). Moreover, many early houses and settlement workers were motivated by religious convictions to reform and strengthen urban communities experiencing drastic social change

(Scales, 2000; Scales & Kelly, 2011; Williams & Maclean, 2015). As such, we suggest the legacy of the settlement house can provide Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations an additional model of practice that emphasizes the empowerment of community residents and the strengthening of social ties in neighborhoods and communities while providing opportunities to practice Christian values such as hospitality and stewardship.

After reviewing the history and key aspects of the settlement house movement as well as its relationship with Christian community ministry at the turn of the 20th century, we present a case example of one contemporary faith-based settlement in Waco, Texas, the Good Neighbor House. Drawing on experiences of the Good Neighbor model, we highlight lessons learned and potential strategies for community social work practice in 21st-century communities.

### **The Settlement House Experiment**

The profession of social work generally connects its evolution to two social welfare movements: the Charity Organization Society (COS) movement and the Settlement House (SH) movement. Often recounted in an over-simplified narrative, histories of social work may neglect other important threads in the story. Child welfare providers and church-related organizations were also important building blocks of professional social work (Garland, 1994; Scales & Kelly, 2011). In some cases the narrative is distorted to portray COS workers as religiously motivated caseworkers over against the SH workers who are portrayed as secular humanists leading community change. More accurately, many social workers in both COS and SH movements were motivated by their faith, just like today. Moreover, while many settlement houses evolved into what Davis (1984) called “spearheads for reform,” some houses were not focused on social activism but instead provided social services and educational activities. Historical interest in the most famous and most thoroughly documented settlement houses, such as Jane Addams’ Hull House of Chicago, has sometimes led observers to overlook the diverse motivations and activities of settlement houses, including settlement houses with religious affiliations.

Emerging in the latter quarter of the 19th century, both the COS and SH movements were rooted in London, England, where dire poverty of the Victorian era inspired Protestant clergy to suggest new solutions. One group, the COS followers, held three key assumptions: that moral deficiencies of poor people caused urban poverty, that correcting these moral deficiencies would eliminate poverty, and that a network of charity organizations would need to cooperate and document their home investigations of poor people in order to address poverty and prevent duplication of services to the poor (Ginzberg, 1990). In contrast, the SH movement, also initiated by Protestant clergy, experimented with a different method which emphasized not individual reform, but a neighborly approach to establishing communication and relationship between well-to-do volunteer “settlers” and lower-income neighbors. The first experimental SH was Toynbee Hall, founded in London

by a Protestant minister, Samuel Barnett, and his wife Henrietta Barnett. Renting or purchasing a large building, settlers invited neighbors into a common space designed for education, recreation, art, or other types of enrichment previously unavailable in the area. Settlers, often college students or well-educated men and women of means, lived in or near the settlement house as volunteers (Johnson, 2001).

At the forefront of the SH philosophy was a democratic ideal or, as Jane Adams expressed it, settlements were based “on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal” (Davis, 1984, p.19). Settlements focused their energies not on reforming individuals but on addressing social problems and improving neighborhoods. In fact, settlements carried out some of the first sociological studies of immigrant communities, using their insights to initiate reforms in the area of child labor, sanitation, and women’s working conditions (Williams & Mclean, 2015). Education and recreation were important activities of the settlement to improve neighbors’ lives. A network of college extension courses, English language classes, vocational training, and the teaching of domestic skills prepared neighbors for work in the United States while kindergartens and playgrounds enriched the lives of children (Davis, 1984).

### **Mutuality and Reciprocity**

One of the most important foundations of the settlement house movement was that of mutuality. Offering an alternative to charity organizations and churches who participated in almsgiving or sometimes judged the worthiness of an individual to receive aid, the settlement workers took a stance of mutual aid. Settlers saw themselves, not as community saviors, but as learners and recipients. As Toynbee Hall founder, Samuel Barnett emphasized that every resident volunteer must learn as well as teach, and must receive as well as give (Johnson, 2001). Encouraging neighbors to give back to the settlement fostered a sense of community. For example, a child who came to take a bath once a week (a common service offered by settlement houses) might be asked to pay a nickel or to sweep the floor. As Johnson (2001) explains,

The importance of the mutuality of the relationship between people from different backgrounds within the settlement framework cannot be overstated: Through direct personal encounter people were enabled to go beyond appearances and preconceptions and to get to know and value the individuality and humanity of each other, thus leading to greater respect for others and for themselves while building a stronger sense of community. (p.73)

This element of settlement house philosophy may be misunderstood in our 21st-century world of philanthropy and donation. However, the early settlers believed that the feeling of community and mutual uplift that a neighborhood may experience comes from every member contributing in line with what he or she can afford.

## **University Partnerships**

Universities were an integral part of the settlement house model and exposing college students to working class neighbors was an important part of the process. Toynbee Hall recruited Oxford University ministerial students to live among London's poor during school breaks. Oxford faculty members like John Ruskin offered lectures in the neighborhood and inspired student residents with their egalitarian ideals (Horowitz, 1974; Johnson, 2001).

American settlements imitated the Toynbee Hall approach and U.S. settlement leaders such as Stanton Coit and Jane Addams visited London to learn about the model, including the synergistic relationship between settlements and their local universities. Settlement leaders invited faculty to lecture and to volunteer while drawing upon university research in disciplines such as education and sociology (Williams & McLean, 2015). John Dewey provides an excellent example of a fruitful partnership with university faculty. Dewey visited Hull House a few years before joining the faculty at the University of Chicago. He and Addams became good colleagues and discussion partners as each forged new experiments in exploring how people learn. Dewey became a regular lecturer at Hull House where neighbors could learn from his insights. He was a lifetime supporter of the Chicago settlement and served on the advisory board for many years (Vorsino, 2015). Other settlements even carried the word "university" in their name, such as the University Settlements in Boston and New York, indicating a strong partnership with students and faculty (Williams & Mclean, 2015).

## **Serving Immigrant Communities**

Settlement houses proliferated on American soil in numbers far greater than their English counterparts did. At the peak of the movement, over 400 settlement houses had been opened in the U.S., mostly in urban areas (Davis, 1977). Large waves of immigrants moving into U.S. cities shaped the agenda of urban settlement houses, particularly in the early 20th century. In 1889, when Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened Hull House in one of one of Chicago's most densely populated neighborhoods they were joining recently-arrived European immigrants including Poles, Italians, Russians, Jews from Eastern Europe, Germans, and Irish. Many were in poverty upon arrival and found severe economic and health challenges in their new American lives (Linn, 1935). As in times past, contemporary settlement houses have the potential to serve today's immigrants. However, due to increasingly strict enforcement of immigration policy in recent years, many immigrants fear deportation and avoid seeking social and government services (Amuedo-Dorantes, Puttitanun, Martinez-Donate, 2013). Contemporary settlement houses can offer a safe place for recreation, learning, and worship for these individuals and families.

## **Segregated by Race and Sex**

The earliest settlement houses were racially segregated. In her important study of African Americans in the settlement movement, Lasch-Quinn (1993) explains that the mainstream settlement movement ignored African American neighbors in spite of its rhetoric of inclusion. In an era of Jim Crow laws, African American volunteers established their own settlements and community centers, often connected to churches and church-related organizations. Early settlement houses also were sex-segregated in terms of their residents, although services were offered to men, women, and children. Toynbee Hall, for example, was for Oxford men and Hull House was a women's community. Interestingly, while both England and the U.S. had houses for male and female workers, England's movement remained primarily masculine, while the U.S. model involved many women seeking opportunities for learning and leadership denied to them in other contexts. In a time when single women did not live alone but stayed with families, in boarding houses, or in religious housing organizations such as the YWCA, the settlement offered to women a perfect opportunity to combine living in a socially acceptable women's community while learning and serving at the same time (Horowitz, 1974; Vorsino, 2015). Much has been written about the empowerment of women residents and leaders.

## **Religiously Motivated Settlers**

Social welfare historian Allen Davis indicates that the majority of American settlement workers were religious. In 1905, a poll of 339 settlement workers showed that 88 percent were active church members and nearly all stated that religion had been a major influence on their lives (Davis, 1984). In fact, some religious groups opened settlement houses for explicitly religious purposes. For example, Methodist women established Wesley Houses with an evangelistic purpose: "The work is evangelical and seeks not only to instruct but to regenerate" (Woods & Kennedy, 1911, p.89). Southern Baptist women of Louisville, Kentucky founded the Baptist Settlement House in 1912 as a means "to give Christ to the neighborhood" and a group of Catholic women in Chicago created the Madonna Center to provide Catholic immigrants a place to receive the sacraments, "to minister to and protect the Catholic traditions" of some of the same neighbors served by Hull House (Scales & Kelly, 2011, pp. 364, 366).

As the settlement experiment evolved, religious workers continued discussions and debates about the place of religion within settlement work. For example, in a paper entitled "Problems of Religion," Arthur Holden (1922) advised that settlements did not need to talk about religion or attempt to teach it. He argued that by simply living a life in service to others, the settlement worker embodied Christian principles. Graham Taylor, Protestant pastor and founder of a settlement house called Chicago Commons, noted that while religious individuals may be involved in settlements, the church and the settlement have two very different purposes. Taylor believed that a church must press the tenets

of its faith, and if it does not, it ceases to be a church of that faith. A settlement, on the other hand, may not embrace any cult or creed lest it forfeit its place as being a common ground for all (Taylor, 1950).

### **Formation of Resident Settlers**

An important part of the settlement house experience was the opportunity for settlers to learn by doing. In some settlements, like Hull House, the “curriculum” for graduate students and young professionals was ad hoc and informal, as women like Alice Hamilton or Florence Kelley practiced their medical and legal skills while helping neighbors. In other cases, the settlement house may have offered a more formal internship experience as students in social work, missions, or ministry worked with neighbors and tried out the skills they were learning in the classroom. For example, Baptist women of the Woman’s Missionary Union Training School at Louisville, Kentucky volunteered in their own settlement house called Good Will Center. They offered educational and recreational activities as well as Bible study for immigrant women and children. The pedagogical benefits of working “hands on” and receiving immediate feedback from teachers contributed to the students’ learning (Scales & Kelly, 2011). As volunteers turned into paid professional social workers throughout the 20th century, these Baptist women became a part of the workforce. Alumni were hired by churches around the Southern United States to establish Good Will Centers in cities like Birmingham or Atlanta (Maxwell, 2011). These settlement workers were precursors to “church social workers,” a label that would enter the vocabulary of Baptists later, during the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Good Neighbor House: A 21st-Century Settlement**

The Good Neighbor model draws on many of the classic principles of the settlement house movement described above while also incorporating new elements intended to meet the 21st-century needs of both neighbors and settlers in a particular context. Below, we provide a brief history of the Good Neighbor House and discuss key aspects of the model.

### **History of Good Neighbor House**

In 2011, when a vacant 90-year-old home in the Sanger Heights neighborhood of Waco, Texas was determined to be unsafe for occupancy, one neighboring homeowner recognized an opportunity to make an impact in her community (Smith, 2012). A professor of higher education and social work, Dr. Laine Scales had long been a student of the 19th-century settlement house movement and wondered if a contemporary version of the settlement house might be beneficial or even possible in the Sanger Heights neighborhood. Dr. Scales’ initial idea led to the purchase of the vacant home in 2011 and five years later the establishment of the Good Neighbor Settlement House and Worship Cen-

ter, a faith-based, nonprofit organization that exists to strengthen and support community among residents in the Sanger Heights neighborhood. Soon after establishment, board members and settlers began referring to the house simply as the Good Neighbor House.

Home to prominent Waco families in the early 1900s, the Sanger Heights neighborhood is today one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city. In 2010, over half of neighborhood residents identified as Hispanic or Latino, approximately 23 percent identified as white, and 20 percent identified as African-American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, there is significant diversity in income, age, and life experience represented among households in the neighborhood. Sanger Heights is home to young professionals, college educators, blue collar and service workers, as well as a significant number of families that fall below the poverty level. While residents are proud of the diversity that exists in the neighborhood, demographic change and population churn over the past several decades have left many residents feeling disconnected from their neighbors and other community members. The Good Neighbor House seeks to address this issue and strengthen neighborhood social ties by following many of the principles of the early settlement house movement in the U.S. and Europe.

After the initial purchase of the house in 2011, Dr. Scales set out to establish the Good Neighbor House as a nonprofit organization and to put together a board of directors to guide the organization's development. She partnered with a dynamic and engaged MSW student living in the neighborhood, Morgan Caruthers, to brainstorm and share tasks. Together they learned about the neighborhood and the process of applying for 501(c)(3) or nonprofit status. To maximize visibility and community involvement, Scales and Caruthers created an executive board to meet weekly and an advisory board to meet monthly. Advisors included community representatives from organizations and churches: Habitat for Humanity, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Baylor University, Texas State Technical College, a volunteer fundraising expert, along with several neighbors and an elected city council representative. The executive board was composed of five members including both neighborhood residents and faculty and students from local universities.

During the first three years, the executive board and advisory board focused primarily on applying for 501(c)(3) status which drove efforts to develop a specific and clear mission for the organization. In this phase board members read historical documents about settlement houses, visited the Hull House museum and the Birmingham Settlement in England, and explored questions about what made a settlement successful and why the movement peaked in the 1920s but was greatly diminished by the 1940s. They also researched modern settlement houses through the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (<https://ifsnetwork.org>). This was an important time of learning and teaching.

Board members also engaged in discussion about the particularities of faith-based settlement houses and the complex relationship between local churches and neighborhood residents who embody many faiths. In this phase board members created statements in the organization's by-laws emphasizing

hospitality over the impulse to evangelize. Drawing on social work scholar David Sherwood's essay on the dangers of evangelizing vulnerable populations, board members determined to emphasize the virtues of inclusion and hospitality as primary faith expressions of the Good Neighbor House (Sherwood, 2002).

After two years, once 501(c)(3) status was granted, the advisory board was dissolved and the executive board was transformed into the board of directors. During this time, board members worked diligently to engage neighbors in creating a vision for GNH. They held informal meetings in neighbors' homes, spoke at churches, engaged the Sanger Heights Neighborhood Association, and held individual meetings with non-profits in the area. Board members discovered that the phrase "settlement house" was unfamiliar to many neighbors. Some incorrectly believed it would be a place for homeless people to "settle." This idea upset some neighbors, and much of the board's energy was spent explaining and correcting misunderstandings about the purpose of the house. This provided further opportunities for board members to gather input from neighbors about what they wanted to see in the house. This process revealed that while homeowners in the area often preferred the home remain a single-family residence, many were open to the idea of a settlement house. The perception among many was that having residents living and working in the house would be preferable to the house remaining vacant, as it had been for two years before Scales purchased it.

Between 2011 and 2016, board members and volunteers worked diligently to raise funds, rehabilitate the house, develop a community garden in the previously rock-filled back yard, and continue engaging residents in the neighborhood through planned events. Refurbishing the house was the most urgent matter as the City of Waco had placed the building on a list to be demolished, or "red tagged." Multiple meetings with city planners and inspectors, resulting in extensions, provided reprieve long enough for the board to raise money for refurbishment. While the majority of funds came from one donor, smaller amounts raised from neighbors and local groups provided a tangible buy-in from community members. For example, two sisters, ages seven and nine living a few blocks away hosted a lemonade stand, bringing a profit of \$5 dollars. Their gift moved and inspired board members to continue fundraising, even in challenging times.

Another motivator for the board was the decision to move forward and begin using the grounds, even while the house itself was red tagged. Board members and volunteers hosted outdoor concerts, a community garage sale, and Halloween and Cinco de Mayo festivities on the premises. These events helped the Good Neighbor House to establish and nurture important relationships with neighbors. In 2014 and 2015, the board rented a neighboring house allowing three settlers to move in next door into a building known as "the cottage" to start building social capital in the neighborhood. Settlers walked around the neighborhood, engaged neighbors in conversation, asked for community input on the vision, and helped with fundraising and hosting outdoor events. These years allowed the board to focus on settler formation and learn about the joys and struggles of supervising young people as they establish community life together with a specific purpose of neighborhood improvement.

After five years of work and significant preparation, Good Neighbor House opened in 2016 with three live-in settlers. Since then, the organization has sought to fulfill a unique mission in the Sanger Heights neighborhood and in Waco, Texas:

Building on the Christian mandate to love our neighbors and on the ideals of the early settlement houses, Good Neighbor House facilitates social integration and worship among diverse Wacoans as we invest our knowledge, faith, and experiences in community life together.

We:

- Create and maintain a safe and welcoming community space for all neighbors: individuals, families, and groups.
- Organize minimal, flexible programming to build community among neighbors (e.g. gardening, worship, arts, lending library).
- Host non-profit community groups aligning with our mission (e.g. language classes, worship groups, arts and crafts groups, 12-step programs).
- Participate in the spiritual, intellectual and social formation of settlers and other volunteers as they experience the joys and challenges of daily life in a diverse neighborhood.
- Honor the traditional settlement idea by partnering with Waco's churches, college and university groups, businesses, and others in support of our mission. (Good Neighbor House, n.d.)

## **The Good Neighbor Model**

**Community space.** One of the most significant contributions that settlement houses made in urban neighborhoods of the 19th century was the provision of community space where residents from diverse backgrounds, many of whom were immigrants, could come together to learn, socialize, and address common problems (Davis, 1984). The need for organizations and spaces that foster such social connection and integration continues to exist in contemporary communities (Putnam 2000; Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003). A central component of Good Neighbor House's mission in the Sanger Heights neighborhood is to provide community space where neighbors come together in ways that strengthen social connection and contribute to the development of social capital in the neighborhood. The house serves as a place in the community where bridges can be built between residents and where neighbors can come together to address shared needs and community issues. The organization welcomes community members and groups to use the common spaces of the house and the grounds to host community events and programming. The common spaces include a living room, library, multi-purpose room, and kitchen. The board of directors has developed specific building use policies and a process for reserving space that ensures facilities are both accessible and safe for visitors and settlers alike. Over the past four years, a wide range of community groups have utilized space

in the house and yard to host activities such as reading groups, Girl Scout troop meetings, tai-chi classes, Spanish language classes, Bible studies, and music and arts events. These events, made possible through the simple provision of space and hospitality, have begun to nurture new and meaningful connections in the neighborhood and community.

**Settlers.** It is impossible to understand the Good Neighbor model without a discussion of the key role of settlers. Similar to the way that early settlement houses were organized (Johnson, 2001), a team of settlers lies at the heart of the work of Good Neighbor House. Indeed, the settlers are the actors that bring the vision and mission of the organization to life. Settlers may be adult women, men, or couples who volunteer to live and work at the house for a period of at least 12 months. Settlers live on site, in living quarters that are separate from the house's common spaces. In return for reduced rent, each settler volunteers seven to ten hours of his or her time per week to carry out the day-to-day operations of the house. Settler responsibilities include such things as planning and managing events, tending the community garden, cleaning, providing basic maintenance, publicizing events, fundraising, producing a newsletter, and other daily administrative tasks. Settlers interact regularly with board members by serving on a "cluster," a committee group that leads various functions such as community engagement, fundraising, and maintenance of the house and grounds. Through the volunteer work of the board, the settlers, and other community volunteers, Good Neighbor House is able to serve its neighborhood with no paid staff members. This arrangement keeps the organization agile and cost-effective with utilities and house maintenance being the primary expenses. It also mirrors the 19th-century model, a pre-professional model when settlers were unpaid volunteers. In essence, settlers are the staff and the public face of Good Neighbor.

In addition to house management, settlers have opportunities to interact with neighbors as they serve as hosts to each event. Just as with early settlements, Good Neighbor House seeks to be a place where settlers and neighborhood residents enjoy a relationship of reciprocity, learning from one another (Johnson, 2001). The Good Neighbor model also taps into some of the early traditions of religious settlement houses as discussed above (Scales & Kelly, 2011). Settler training and orientation emphasizes the Christian virtue of hospitality and settlers are able to form relationships with neighbors who frequent the building. Settlers are encouraged to walk the neighborhood and attend neighborhood events so that they may become acquainted with and invest directly in the lives of neighbors and community members while they are serving at Good Neighbor House. These characteristics, drawn from early settlement houses, makes the Good Neighbor model distinct from other community service agencies in the neighborhood. In contrast to traditional models of community service, where outsiders enter the community for short periods, settlers are expected to become a part of the neighborhood in which they are serving. They are encouraged to view their role as that of a "good neighbor" working alongside others to enhance and strengthen the life of the community around them. What settlers' investment looks like differs for each cohort of settlers that serve at the house.

Some have invested through their work in the community garden. Others have invested by offering art classes to neighborhood youth or inviting neighbors into the house for shared meals and fellowship. What has been consistent across cohorts is that, drawing on the concept of Christian hospitality; settlers have found creative and meaningful ways to build relationships with the diverse individuals and families living in the neighborhood. Because the mission of Good Neighbor House is centered in a commitment to Christian ideals of hospitality and inclusion, settlers are expected to identify as Christian and to be a part of a local congregation. In addition, to supporting the mission of the organization, this requirement fosters mutually beneficial relationships between Good Neighbor House and congregations in the community. Settlers are able to share with their local congregations what is happening at the settlement house, and congregations are invited to utilize the space. Several settlers' congregations have begun to use space at the house in recent years because of their personal connection to the work of Good Neighbor House.

Over the past five years, 19 settlers have volunteered their time and gifts at Good Neighbor House. Each spring, prospective settlers go through an application and interview process facilitated by the board of directors. Depending on current house needs and the qualifications of applicants, the board typically selects several new settlers each year to serve terms of 12 months. Settlers may continue serving beyond this initial term if the board is supportive. Each year, the board strives to form a team of settlers that is composed of some new and some experienced settlers. Settlers attend a half-day training at the beginning of their service in August and participate in a mid-year retreat with members of the board. In the first years, three settlers served at a time. However, as the organization has grown and the workload increased, so has the number of settlers needed to carry out the work of the house. Today, there are six settlers living and working at Good Neighbor House.

In addition to serving in the house and serving the neighborhood, settlers are required to contribute to each other's well-being in specific ways. Settlers participate in weekly team meetings as well as activities focused on personal and spiritual formation. They also agree to work together to manage shared living space, agree to treat settlers and neighbors with respect as equals, and contribute to the various projects of Good Neighbor House. Initially, the board planned to identify a lead settler in each cohort who would be responsible for coordinating the work of the settlers and overseeing the functioning of the house. However, early on board members determined this would be a significant responsibility to place on a volunteer settler. Instead, the board identifies a board member to fulfill this role each year. The designated board member meets with settlers weekly and coordinates both the work and the formation of the team of settlers. In the past, this board member has been someone with ministry and/or social work training. The board has also developed a Settler Handbook that provides information settlers may need for carrying out the work of the Good Neighbor House on a daily basis.

A distinctive element of the Good Neighbor model is an emphasis on the personal and spiritual formation of settlers. This was characteristic of some of the

early religious settlement houses in the U.S. (Scales & Kelly, 2011). Recognizing that most settlers will serve for a limited period, the goal of this aspect of the Good Neighbor model is to support settlers' personal development and to have a lasting impact on the way that they understand their responsibility as neighbors and community members when they leave Good Neighbor House. In addition to their commitment to carrying out the work of the house, settlers are required to participate in weekly formation activities with other settlers and board members. In the past, formation activities have included opportunities for Bible study, worship, team building, fostering self-awareness, learning more about community development, and meeting members of the neighborhood. These events typically occur at Good Neighbor House or in the home of a neighbor or supporter in the community. Settlers are also expected to develop specific learning goals for their year, to engage a local congregation, and to grow in how they live with other settlers in community and how they engage the neighborhood.

In contrast to many of the early settlement houses that were segregated by sex, the most famous of which relied on the volunteer labor of young white women who were studying at university, in this 21st-century model, men and women serve together as settlers while living on separate floors or in different buildings. Good Neighbor House also welcomes married couples, which was rare in the 19th-century settlements (although Toynbee Hall's Samuel and Henrietta Barnett provide an early example). Settlers also represent a diversity of ages and personal backgrounds. Settlers have ranged in age from 20s to 50s and come from a variety of different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. The application asks that all settlers be at least 21, but notes that exceptions can be made in some circumstances. While most settlers have been full-time students at one of the nearby universities, a few have been working in other fields while serving. The synergy of an intergenerational community of both men and women, single and married serves Good Neighbor well in its daily life. Importantly, settlers are socialized as an egalitarian community in terms of gender roles. Both men and women do a variety of domestic chores and yard work; men and women serve in leadership roles, without discrimination.

**Empowering neighbors.** Another unique aspect of the settlement house tradition was its emphasis on the empowerment of neighborhood residents. While many houses did provide direct services to the community, they also sought to develop grassroots leaders and to encourage a sense of ownership of the programs and services offered. As discussed above, a sense of reciprocity was encouraged between settlers and residents (Johnson, 2001). In addition to providing services for neighbors, early settlers learned from neighborhood residents. Drawing on this idea, the Good Neighbor model emphasizes the value of creating space and opportunity for neighbors and community members to come together to develop new and innovative programs and events to enhance the community. In contrast to more traditional community organizations, Good Neighbor House offers little in the way of direct programming or services. Rather, community members have led the majority of events occurring at the house since it opened in 2016. If a group of neighbors determines there is a need for

education on nutrition or healthy living, a weekly Bible study, or a bi-weekly grief group, Good Neighbor House provides an accessible, safe environment within which community members can pursue such ends. Settlers are available to help to schedule events, ensure that spaces are clean and set up appropriately, and provide assistance for groups using the house. They may participate in such groups if invited. Leadership, however, remains in the hands of neighbors and community members. In essence, neighbors are both teachers and learners. They develop valuable transferable civic skills as they plan and organize such events. In this way, Good Neighbor House is a catalyst for the development of grassroots leadership and programming.

In addition to serving as a space for community-led programming, Good Neighbor House does provide minimal programming each year to engage the surrounding community. Over the past five years, board members and settlers have held back-yard concerts, arts events, and open houses to raise financial support for the organization and to showcase the facilities. In recent years, settlers have organized and managed a community garden that provides fresh produce for community members and organizations. Each fall, settlers and board members participate in a community-wide Halloween block party to support neighborhood families and children.

**University relationships.** Many early settlement houses enjoyed a close relationship with educational institutions and universities (Williams & Maclean, 2015). As described above, settlers were often female university students who worked and lived in the houses while pursuing education. Settlement houses provided affordable housing in exchange for these women's investment in the surrounding neighborhoods. In the same way, Good Neighbor House has sought to leverage connections with local colleges and universities to recruit both settlers and community supporters. While settlers come from diverse backgrounds and ages, the majority have been students attending nearby colleges and universities. The Sanger Heights neighborhood is fortunate to be in close proximity to several institutions of higher education including McLennan Community College, Texas State Technical College, and Baylor University, a large religiously affiliated university. Additionally, the organization's founder and early board members included faculty, students, and alumni of these institutions. Over the past five years, students studying in programs as varied as social work, visual arts, business, environmental science, law, and theology have served as settlers at Good Neighbor House. Each of these settlers brings with them a unique vocational perspective and set of skills that contribute to the work of the house. For instance, one settler studying environmental science volunteered to install rain barrels for water harvesting and a drip irrigation system for the garden. Another settler with a background in arts and music planned opportunities for local artists and musicians to gather and share their work.

Another way that the organization has leveraged its unique connection to colleges and universities is through the mentoring of interns and service learning students from various academic programs. For example, an intern from one university's English department worked with board members to improve the orga-

nization's public communications and social media presence. Likewise, students in business and communications have helped the organizations to strengthen its fundraising strategy, and a doctoral student in sociology helped the board of directors develop a community profile of the Sanger Heights neighborhood using census data. Colleges and university organizations such as sororities, fraternities, and service clubs have donated volunteer time for building projects, cleaning, and fundraising. In 2017, as a part of a class assignment, a group of philanthropy students was instrumental in helping Good Neighbor House obtain grant funding to build a new outdoor patio for staging community concerts and events. In these ways and more, the connections that the organization has fostered with faculty, students, and alumni of local educational institutions benefit the organization and the neighborhood. These relationships contribute to the development of social capital in the community and create avenues through which students and faculty share their valuable knowledge and resources with the wider community.

**Practicing Christian hospitality.** While early settlement houses had roots in 19th-century religious reform movements, many of the houses that emerged did not have specifically religious missions or affiliations. In this way, the Good Neighbor model is somewhat distinct from many of the early settlement houses. While Good Neighbor House does not affiliate with any specific religious body or institution, the organization has chosen to root its mission in a distinctively Christian understanding of hospitality and responsibility for the community. Indeed, Good Neighbor House views the creation of space where neighbors and community members come together informally and where community connections are strengthened as an important way of practicing the Christian virtue of hospitality. In essence, Good Neighbor House and the settlers who live there open up their home to be used by the wider community. Settlers and board members do not engage in proselytization or evangelism but welcome all community groups, irrespective of religious belief or practice, to use the space. Moreover, since the house opened, groups from several different religious groups including Baptists, Mennonites, and Quakers have used the house for hosting religious meetings or worship services.

In addition to being a space for Christian hospitality in the neighborhood, the Good Neighbor model emphasizes developing relationships with the diverse religious congregations that are present and active in the Sanger Heights community. Over the past several decades, the neighborhood has experienced an influx of new religious congregations including ethnic Christian congregations, charismatic and Pentecostal churches, and non-Christian religious groups. Settlers and board members have sought to engage and build supportive relationships with these groups by inviting them to use space at Good Neighbor House and by offering to speak about Good Neighbor House in their congregations. Additionally, one of the board's goals has been to increase support for the organization by inviting neighborhood congregations to collaborate with Good Neighbor House and support it through both funding and service. This has been a challenging area of work but one that is central to Good Neighbor House's mission. Local congregations have been supportive of Good Neighbor

House in many ways—providing volunteers to help with construction projects, utilizing space for meetings, and publicizing Good Neighbor events. However, commitments of financial support from congregations have been less common.

### **Lessons for Christians in Social Work**

As we stated in the opening of this article, Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations must be prepared to draw from and utilize a variety of practice models and strategies in order to help neighborhoods and communities address the many challenges they face in the 21st century. Moreover, we suggest that Christians in social work have much to learn from history. While standard narratives of social work history may ignore or distort the influence of Christian volunteers on social welfare history, sharing these rich stories not only corrects our historical record, but also provides inspiration for practice today. Our professional grandmothers and grandfathers were not perfect human beings and, like us, they made mistakes. Social workers of the 21st century have the benefit of historical lenses to examine and evaluate the pros and cons of models like the settlement house experiment. Using these models and improving upon them, Christian community practitioners may find much about the settlement house model to imitate while at the same time revising the model for 21st-century communities. We suggest that the following summary of lessons learned from the experiences of those instrumental in establishing Good Neighbor House may be helpful for Christian community social work practitioners seeking to utilize the settlement house model and to integrate a Christian perspective in their work:

*Choose your location carefully while examining census data.* Good Neighbor House board members chose a residential community that was unusually diverse for a city comprised of mostly segregated neighborhoods. The location can easily be reached by many neighbors by walking or biking and has many churches nearby that may be engaged in the work of the organization. A strong neighborhood association already established enhanced the settlement's work and offered a starting point for developing partnerships. Location and proximity to neighbors, resources, and local churches can have an important effect on facility use and support.

*Meet with neighbors early and let them drive the agenda.* Early supporters and board members solicited ideas in neighborhood meetings and in informal conversations with neighbors. Though they planned to refurbish the run-down building more quickly, it turned out to be an advantage to have had two years of settlement operations with settlers living in a neighboring building. This time of preparation provided an opportunity for continuing neighborhood conversations and ensuring that neighbors had plenty of time to express their desires for the house. When Good Neighbor House opened, board members were able to invite groups that already existed to use the space, rather than having to plan new uses. This basic principle of listening to neighbors and facilitating activities they have already determined they want is a hallmark of community organizing.

Further, it allowed settlers and board members to demonstrate in concrete ways the organization's commitment to the Christian principals of hospitality and incarnational service in the community. Seeking to accomplish organizational priorities first would have been an error and perhaps would have undermined an important principle of Christian community practice.

*Immigrant populations are still important neighbors for settlement houses.* Settlement houses arose at a time when industrialization, immigration, and urbanization coalesced in the United States. While marginalization of immigrants was common then as now, today's immigrant populations face unprecedented threat. A safe space for neighbors, native born or immigrant, is essential in the 21st century. Drawing on the rich Biblical tradition of God's concern for immigrants and strangers (Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25:35), faith-based settlements like Good Neighbor House can reclaim this role of providing a non-government sponsored place of hospitality, learning, and recreation. As America's communities grow increasingly diverse, this is a vital role for faith-based and religiously affiliated organizations to play. According to census data, the block in which Good Neighbor House is located is 50 percent Latinx, which often indicates a hidden immigrant population that may benefit from traditional settlement house services for immigrants. In 2016, one month after Good Neighbor House opened its doors; the settlement began to provide office space to an immigration lawyer from *American Gateways*, a Christian organization providing free legal assistance to immigrants. Families in crisis discreetly and safely entered through an unmarked door to seek help and advice. The organization soon outgrew its offices in the house. However, the partnership inspired an immediate tie to immigrant families in the community.

*Connect with local universities and colleges, while still maintaining a separate identity.* The Good Neighbor House has striven to establish meaningful connections with faculty and staff of local universities. Unfortunately, universities often have histories of discrimination and elitism in college towns, which can color neighbors' impressions of college-sponsored programs. While many board members and settlers have formal connections to a large, Christian university in town, they determined early on that the settlement must be community-owned, not university owned. As a result, the board chose as their first partners the local technical college. An architecture class helped design Good Neighbor House's refurbishment. Intentionally steering away from the impression that the house is a university-owned effort, the board made sure to include settlers who attended local community or technical colleges as well. As Good Neighbor House became more established and its approach to community-ownership more well known, the organization embraced university partnerships more fully, particularly with student groups that wanted to connect with communities outside the university bubble. Many student groups enjoy using the house's meeting space for retreats and off-campus projects while also attending concerts and events. Board members observed that facilitating an off-campus link between students and a diverse community was a worthy learning experience for university students, just as it was 125 years ago for the privileged men of Toynbee

Hall. As a faith-based organization, Good Neighbor House also recognized that partnerships with student groups offered many students of faith an important opportunity to demonstrate their religious commitments to service and justice in new and formative ways.

*A building is both an asset and a liability.* Operation of a settlement house is not possible without a house. In the case of Good Neighbor House, choosing a red-tagged building scheduled for demolition made the property purchase affordable, yet this decision also created many challenges. An old building with many problems required many hours of labor and much expense to refurbish. An unanticipated increase in property taxes and insurance due to the city's recent growth brought unanticipated financial challenges for the organization. Despite such challenges, board members feel the Good Neighbor House and its adjacent cottage for settlers has been a fruitful location. Still, settlement leaders and board members must be realistic about the costs of maintaining a building, both financially and in terms of energy from the board and settlers.

*Establish a culture of mutuality and reciprocity.* A settlement house must be egalitarian. This means that every neighbor, whatever their advantages or disadvantages have been, has something to give and something to receive. Settlers and board members must maintain a stance of generosity, while also being willing to receive gifts. This model of reciprocity and "buy in" from neighbors provides funding for utilities and operations without over taxing lower income neighbors. Neighbors participating in the settlement house activities may receive services or entertainment, but they are also expected to contribute something, whether it be a small amount of money, an art piece to hang on the wall, or an afternoon mowing the lawn. This stance of reciprocity preserves the dignity and worth of neighbors and settlers as they work together on community improvement. At Good Neighbor House, formal fundraising and grant writing is reserved for special projects. For example, the board applied for and received a grant to build an outdoor stage and deck, which accommodates outdoor theatre, concerts, and a "Porch Tales" storytelling event. This emphasis on mutuality permeates the settlement house culture and is designed to instill a sense that one group does not own Good Neighbor House, but it belongs to the neighborhood.

*Carefully decide the role of religion in a settlement house.* Traditional settlement houses maintained many different stances in terms of their explicit ties to religion. Some, like the Baptist Good Will Center were places of missionary zeal with a goal to convert all visitors to the center while others practiced religion quietly and separately from their settlement work. Varieties of possibilities are legitimate ways of Christian service. The key lesson is that all participants, board members, settlers, volunteers, and neighbors must understand the intent. This takes a great deal of discussion, training, and media messaging. At Good Neighbor House, all board members and settlers declare their Christian faith at the application stage. Christian affiliation is made clear in the organization's by-laws and on the website as well as in the daily life of the organization. At the same time, board members and settlers strive to be clear that any person of any faith or no faith will be included and accepted at the settlement house. Inspired by the social gospel pastor

and Christian sociologist Graham Taylor, Good Neighbor House maintains that the functions of a settlement house and a congregation are different. At times, this means that a particular settler or volunteer may not be a good fit for Good Neighbor House if they wish to use the house as a home base for proselytizing. While evangelism may be an important role of Christian congregations, conversion it is not the primary goal of the Good Neighbor House. Maintaining this stance requires much discussion, training, and prayer as the board and settlers work together to provide a safe space that is welcoming for all.

*Plans and Prayers for settler formation.* The role of forming a person who chooses to spend a year in the settlement house is a holy privilege. Settlers are not simply volunteer laborers; rather they are learners who have a tremendous opportunity for experiential learning about their faith, their neighbors, and Christ's incarnation. The historical record is very thin in terms of what formal activities early settlement houses may have conducted to promote learning for the settlers. Early settlers and their supervisors had a tendency to look outward, toward their clients in their essays and other writings. Diaries and other records they left behind have little reflection on how the settler may have been transformed by the experience. However, Good Neighbor House board members recognized that contemporary settlers, many of whom are students in social work, ministry, or education, are stepping into roles with daily opportunities for learning. Settlers are asked to articulate their learning goals for the year during the application process as well as in their initial orientation. Intentionality and planning for settler formation ensure they have time for training, reading, and reflection. For example, when settlers read together Christine Pohl's (2012) *Living into community: Cultivating practices that sustain us*, they have weekly opportunities to discuss the inward and outward communities they are creating. In other words, the book opened up discussion about life together as settlers while also challenging the group to look outward at the Good Neighbor community they were creating. Some settlers have journaled about their experiences, reflecting a variety of transformations over time. In the busyness of daily tasks, board members and settlers may be tempted to neglect being intentional about the learning opportunity. However, settlement house leaders must take seriously their role in settler formation.

In summary, we suggest that the legacy of the settlement house movement provides Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations a unique model of practice that has the potential to address some of the most pressing challenges facing 21st-century communities (i.e., social isolation, declining trust, etc.). Indeed, the settlement house model emphasizes the empowerment of community residents and the strengthening of social ties in neighborhoods and communities, and it corresponds well with Christian ideals of stewardship, community responsibility, and inclusiveness. Establishing a settlement in 21st-century communities is not without its challenges, as is seen in the experience of the Good Neighbor House. Nevertheless, this classic model, central to the development of the social work profession, has much to offer neighborhoods, communities, and the community practitioners that serve them.

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### Endnote

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