

Lamb House: A Refuge from Fire and Storm

A Mission of the Cherryfield Congregational Church

~ Rev. Larry Zimmerman

“Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.” ~ Deuteronomy 31:6 NRSV

In 2012, the Cherryfield Congregational Church purchased the adjacent residential property located at 8 River Road, a scant few yards away from the side entrance of the church (in fact, the property shares a driveway with the church). Although the home is visually associated with the church because of its location, it was privately owned until the congregation acquired the property.

After much planning, the Cherryfield church decided to make this property a mission project by using the house as a short-term shelter for those who had lost their home. This single, two-story family home, now called the “Lamb House” (so named because it was owned by Kay Lamb, a former member of the congregation), includes 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a kitchen.

In the time since its acquisition, the Lamb House has been managed and used on an as-needed basis, sometimes as a temporary home for visiting mission groups and interns at the Downeast Campus of the Maine Seacoast Mission. However, church members felt that with some repairs, it could be made suitable for emergency, short-term family dwelling to meet community needs.



In 2011 alone, in a total of 11 reported fires in Washington County, 30 individuals had to find alternate living space. The Cherryfield Independent School District reports that many children had to change schools as a result of fire. Currently, the resources for these families-in-need consist of motels, family, and friends. Furthermore, there is no single agency that offers temporary, free housing for these families.

It is hard to overstate the impact of dislocation on a community, particularly in a small town such as Cherryfield in a sparsely populated Washington county. Church members have witnessed the effects first-hand of the loss of community residents who must relocate where they can find living space, sometimes out-of-state – children forced to change schools and leave friends – and parents and children separated because the breadwinner must stay close to his/her employment, with no room for the rest of the family.

Mark Richmond, a local contractor and church trustee, began the work in May with start-up money and a couple of generous donations to the church to get the project going, which opened the door for many volunteers who came to help. A retired plumber donated his time. A local building

supply company gave the church a generous discount on building materials. Volunteers from churches in Maine and as far away as Pennsylvania who came to work on projects for the Maine Seacoast Mission donated time on the Lamb House project. At one point, there were about 20 people scraping, painting, and cleaning at the Lamb House. Several inmates from the correctional facility in nearby Machias were on hand to help as well. By mid-July, the house was ready enough to house a group of medical volunteers who come Downeast each summer to provide services to the migrant workers who harvest blueberries.

On a Sunday morning in early October, fire destroyed a two-family house just down the street from the church. The Lamb House was quickly prepared for its first guest: the owner of the destroyed property, who was lucky to have escaped the inferno.

Now the Cherryfield church is faced with having to replace the heating system much sooner than expected. This past fall, the congregation received a \$5,000 grant from the Maine Conference Resourcing the Local Church. Several other grants have also been submitted thanks to a committee of church members and two summer attendees who have grant writing expertise. Recently the church learned that the Maine Community Foundation will give a grant of \$15,000! In addition, the Cherryfield Fire Department donated \$1,000 to the project.

The Cherryfield Congregational Church still has a long way to go before renovations are completed. This little church of 33 members took on a huge project, but the enthusiasm to see it through has only increased now that it has already met a need in the community.

LAMB HOUSE MISSION

The Lamb House will promote community and family stability by serving as an emergency dwelling for families who have been forced to leave their homes due to fire, structural damage from natural causes, or eviction for safety and health risks.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the Lamb House is to prevent family disruption and promote community stability in Washington and Hancock Counties by:

- Providing temporary housing for families;
- Keeping children in their neighborhood schools;
- Keeping parents close to their source of employment; and
- Reducing family disruption by allowing family members to reside together.

To watch an archival video of the Lamb House before renovation, go to:

<http://bangordailynews.com/2014/09/29/news/down-east/its-sorely-needed-cherryfield-church-seeks-help-to-renovate-home-for-temporary-shelter/>

“Like” us on Facebook and read about the ongoing ministry at the Lamb House:

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Lamb-House-a-refuge-from-fire-and-storm-in-Cherryfield-Maine-1512428752335322/?fref=ts>