**Key Learnings from the Kidders - Faith Forum**

By Lisa Wiens Heinsohn

On Sunday February 15, Jeff Kidder (our Sunday Evening Music Director) and his wife Kristen came to the Adult Faith Forum to share their experiences of starting an intentional Christian community called "Crossroads Community" in Frogtown.   As they explained, they had gone on a mission trip to Haiti with their church, Messiah Episcopal in St. Paul, and were so captivated by the combination of vulnerability, sharing (generosity might be better than sharing), and genuine community that they experienced with their group and with the Haitians they visited that when they returned they tried to find a way to continue to keep God at the center of their lives by forming an intentional Christian community here.

* After a year of discernment and praying together, three couples decided to buy two houses connected by a large corner greenspace in Frogtown. Why Frogtown? "All paths seemed to lead there," said Jeff & Kristen. About 10-15 additional people committed themselves to being part of the community, though not to move to Frogtown.
* They decided to use Charles Perkins' notion of "beloved community," which is founded on three principles: relocation (sharing the lives, vulnerabilities, and struggles of the people you are seeking to serve); reconciliation (between God and humans and among humans across lines of difference); and redistribution (freely sharing the resources that you have with those in need). They also discerned a call particularly to children of the neighborhood.
* The community shared resources, so that they could work less than full time and devote energy to simple relationship-building in the neighborhood. They helped each other with house projects; they shared lawnmowers and snowblowers and equipment like that.
* They agreed to have two community meals together each week-a commitment of time and energy that "took sacrifice", as they describe it, but that was essential for maintaining their intentions, capacity to engage in ongoing discernment, and to support one another.
* They waited 6-7 years before they began doing any sort of "program" in the neighborhood - first, they wanted to build relationships and gain trust.
* They bought an empty lot (the Kidder's house was built on a double lot which provides a large corner greenspace) in order to have a place local children could play. At times, they said, they had 70-90 kids playing at one time!
* They served a "potluck" meal Wednesday nights to the kids, and also did a kind of vacation bible school outside.
* Today, they remain in relationship with a number of children who used to play in their yard and are now grown.  They are able to be a stable source of love, caring and support for a wide number of Frogtown community residents across the generations.
* They have continually sensed that when they are willing to take risks for the sake of sharing love, God meets them where they are and supplies what they need.
* Over time, their mission statement has significantly shortened. At first it was long, detailed, and took much time and structuring.  But as it stands today, their mission statement is simple: "Love Jesus, Live Jesus, In Community, In Frogtown."  They identified that the "Live Jesus" portion of the mission statement is by far the most challenging and humbling part of it. They have called Frogtown home for the past 25 years.

After their presentation, we discussed a variety of topics, such as how they had kept their own kids safe in a high-crime neighborhood; whether any other Frogtown residents had ever become members of their community; and our own experiences of Christian community and urban ministry. Jeff and Kristen hope that their experiences will support our own efforts to discern where God is calling us to engage, deeply and for the sake of long-lasting transformation on all sides, with our neighbors.