



## A CHARMED CITY

Baltimore has been called a city of neighborhoods. The “Charm City” has over 60 distinct neighborhoods, each with their own personality and ethos. Nationally, Baltimore is judged by its problems. Those problems *are* real and palpable, but they do not tell the whole story. In many ways, the city is experiencing a renaissance. Instead of residents fleeing to the suburbs, many influencers are committing to stay and be a part of the rebirth.

## A FRESH MOVEMENT

Many churches once fled to the suburbs too. Now, churches are seeing greater value in the city. Churches are far more than networks or social gatherings. They are anchors for communities, applying resources and ingenuity to families, communities and the urban core.

City Church was started in 2013, but the vision and groundwork were years in the making. City Church began and has flourished under two specific convictions. The first is that the planting of new churches is one of the most (if not *the* most) effective ways to spread the life-giving message of Jesus Christ. The second conviction is that the city is the most fun and strategic place to do that. And so, City Church is “a neighborhood church for the city we love.”

Patrick and Rebecca Donohue, while working in a large, regional church west of Baltimore City, felt that the neighborhoods in North Baltimore were a particularly strategic context in which to begin a church planting initiative. They believed that the influence of the Gospel on the influencers of Baltimore City could bring the relevance and impact of the faith to the entire city. So, in 2012, the Donohue’s moved into North Baltimore. In their living room, the seeds began to grow and a vision was born for what has now become City Church.

## SECOND STEPS

The groundwork has been laid and a small, young community of Christ-followers are practicing intentional community and service in North Baltimore. It hasn’t been easy. The cultural winds are mostly apathetic and, at times, oppositional. This has forced City Church to be clear about its mission and strategy. Before someone commits to our faith community, they need to test several “on-ramps.” This testing can take years. We’ve found three on-ramps to be particularly strategic.

**Community.** For many, belonging comes before belief. They hunger for community, to know others well and to be known well. Often, this is accomplished through a robust web of home-based community groups.

**Service.** Many want to find venues for service, especially for their families. They want to be a part of the solution, but lack the network that brings venues for deeds of mercy and service.

**Kids.** While many lack a faith commitment personally, they feel the pressure to expose their kids to faith. There is a strong desire to teach their children “something” when it comes to matters of faith.

These on-ramps are often tested for years before someone willingly commits to being a part of the greater church community. Consequently, it requires great patience.

City Church has now moved past the foundational stage and now needs to move into a development stage. The on-ramps of community and service can happen organically and have over the years. However, the kids programming is an on-ramp that requires a high level of intentionality and staffing.

## KIDS

Cultures are often judged by the values that are carried on by the next generation. This is most true in matters of faith. C.S. Lewis famously said, *“Children are not a distraction from the important work, they are the important work.”*

City Church believes that the most foundational step for its development is the formation of a robust program that passes on the faith to our children and adolescents. This program would focus on the basics of the faith, the importance of community, and the drive to serve. These goals can be accomplished through regular gatherings, intentional community, and consistent service projects and mission trips.

This is why City Church is looking to hire a full-time Director of Kids Programming starting in 2017. This director would oversee the current late-elementary program and develop a new, robust middle and high school program.

Imagine having no faith commitment and looking forward to sleeping in on Sunday mornings. Suddenly, your elementary and middle school aged children wake you up, overly concerned that they will miss the church service. While you may not have any religious convictions, your son or daughter is experiencing community, friendship, and excitement from your local neighborhood church. Perhaps this is just the on-ramp that you need to experience faith for yourself.

Would you consider helping City Church make those Sunday morning wake-ups happen in the homes of North Baltimore?