



ORDERING OUR STEPS: The ROCK Initiative Journey

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"You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip." Psalm 18:36



GROUNDBREAKING MAY 2016



SUNSTONE AT ARLINGTON WOODS
BUILD/CONSTRUCTION 2017



The ROCK Initiative

RENEWING OUR COMMUNITY FOR THE KINGDOM

For nearly 100 years, Eastern Star Church (ESC) has been committed to evangelism and discipleship in obedience to the great commission of Jesus Christ. Since God called Pastor Jeffrey A. Johnson, Sr. to ESC 30 years ago, the church has grown in significant ways, adding ministries, staff, facilities, three church plants and programs at three locations in Central Indiana. During that same period, however, the neighborhood surrounding the church's Main Campus on east 30th Street dramatically changed.

ESC has been a part of the east side since 1920, with the first church located at 1200 E. 17th Street on the eastside of Indianapolis. The move to 2201 Columbia Avenue later solidified the church's commitment to the spiritual demands of growing predominately African-American families in the area. Over several decades, as the church continued to grow, the move to 5750 E. 30th Street (Main Campus) and God's favor allowed the church to expand services to not only its members but also to the ever-growing needs of the surrounding community.

THE ROCK INITIATIVE

2019 PROGRAMMATIC BREAKDOWN

COMMUNITY	HOUSING	FINANCIAL SECURITY	EDUCATION	HEALTH
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION	STEPS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP	FINANCIAL FREEDOM INSTITUTE	SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS	BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
ROCK FRESH MARKET	NEW AFFORDABLE APARTMENTS	CREDIT UNION	COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS	HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS
ROCK COMMUNITY HUB	ESC CARE ASSISTANCE	JOB OPPORTUNITIES	EDUCATIONAL SPONSORSHIPS	DIABETES INITIATIVE
COMMUNITY AWARENESS EVENTS	ROCK HOUSING	WORKFORCE & LIFE SKILLS ADVANCEMENT	MENTORSHIP	MEDICAL SERVICES
DAYS OF SERVICE		RE-ENTRY SERVICES	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	NUTRITION AND CULINARY EDUCATION

While the neighborhood is blessed with some strong assets (schools, public safety facilities, a library, parks, available public transportation, etc.), it also has significant challenges. Data about the 46218 zip code and the more proximate area in the mile radius around the church paint a bleak picture of the long-term effects of poverty and disenfranchisement on a community. High unemployment, low household income, and home values, and virtually no access to financial services or healthy food options are all disturbing indicators of a neighborhood in severe economic decline.

In 2001, ESC established JEWEL Human Services to provide a variety of provisions to address the needs of the neighborhood surrounding the church:

- The ESC Care Center operates a food/clothing pantry, emergency assistance, local/global missions and counseling services. The Care Center also partners with area service organizations to connect both members of the church and the greater Indianapolis community with programs that focus on more specific needs.
- JEWEL Properties offers individuals and families safe, affordably priced rental units that are maintained by the church.

Education is a key pillar in the continuum of care at ESC. With more than \$700,000 in scholarships provided to high school graduates over the years, the church also developed an active outreach ministry that supports students and families at a nearby public school, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS)

Arlington Woods Elementary School #99. And after years of its JEWEL Christian Academy and JEWEL Childcare Preschool, the church transitioned to an on-site child care center operated by Early Learning Indiana. From this long history of providing outreach services to the surrounding area, ESC was poised to do something more – something truly transformative, with lasting effects on the lives of area residents.

Faithfully and divinely led by Pastor Johnson, the congregation began a major new initiative – The ROCK (Renewing Our Community for the Kingdom) Initiative – to bridge evangelism and discipleship in 21st century terms to the tangible needs of the community, encouraging and empowering both ESC members and neighborhood residents to transform lives and the community.

How did we do it?

Although ESC launched The ROCK Initiative publicly in May 2017, months of intensive planning went into identifying the four focus areas, recruiting appropriate community partners who shared the same goals and vision for this neighborhood, securing financing for implementation, involving volunteers from the congregation, and building trust in a community that was used to having its needs ignored.

A few months after the public launch, other churches and community development groups asked ESC, “How can we replicate this work?” The advice on the following pages suggests some of the critical factors to consider and work through before launching a similar initiative.



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 “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty”
 Proverbs 21:5 NIV

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“Plans fail for lack of
counsel, but with many
advisors they succeed.”
Proverbs 15:22 NIV

Lesson One: Plan, Plan, Plan

Multiple planning teams have been involved throughout the project:

- A Strategic Planning Committee made up of church leaders, clergy and leadership staff, and representatives from the community (the Mayor’s office, police department, other elected officials, etc.) spent several months outlining the plan’s four focus areas and key implementation strategies. An outside consultant gathered quantitative data about the neighborhood’s economic and social health and qualitative data about neighborhood needs; the consultant also facilitated the planning group discussions and engaged neighborhood residents in reviewing the plan as it evolved.

During this same timeframe, ESC staff gathered feedback about the developing plan from the congregation and the community and began reaching out to potential partners to share the vision for the neighborhood. ESC’s marketing team developed the branding and marketing materials and implemented a

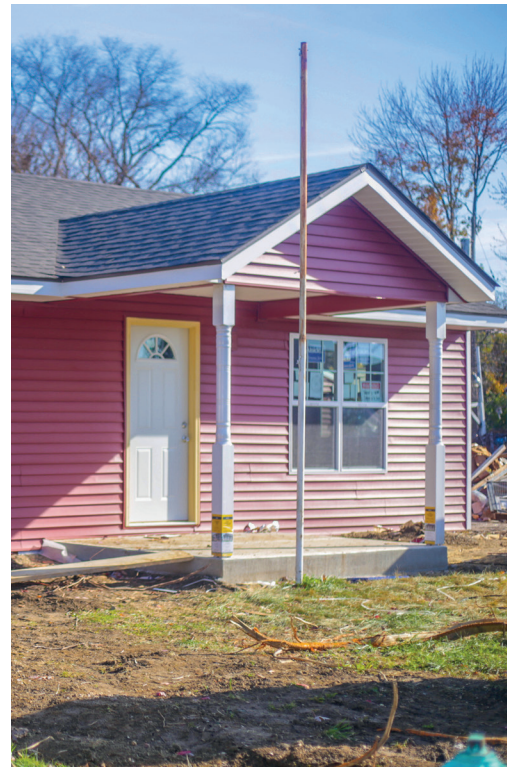
communications plan to share The ROCK Initiative with the congregation and more broadly throughout the Indianapolis community.

- Once the strategic plan was approved, various internal working committees were assembled to figure out how the initiatives could be implemented. ESC already had a number of staff members working on community initiatives (the ESC Care Center team, JEWEL Properties staff and others) but quickly realized that more hands were needed if the initiatives envisioned by the planning committee were going to move forward. By June 2017, the congregation added a new position to the church staff – Community Development Manager – to coordinate the multiple internal planning initiatives and reach out to neighbors. Working committees were assembled for each of the initiatives outlined in the strategic plan (plus a fifth area – health) and tasked with developing the partnerships and the business models required to carry out the work.

These various planning processes required a financial commitment

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Home Renovations



GOAL AREAS:

Eastern Star Church is committed to building partnerships and securing resources to nurture a sustainable community where neighbors care about improving their own lives and each other's.

Goal 1: Build a sense of community among the people who live and work in this neighborhood.

Strategic focus areas:

- Neighborhood Association creation
- Branding/identity
- Safety
- Public sector infrastructure investments
- Support services
- Advocacy
- Food availability

Goal 2: Enhance the range of housing options available within a one-mile radius of Eastern Star Church.

Strategic focus areas:

- Building 25-30 new homes
- Building a mixed-use facility with rental units, community services, and businesses
- Rehab of owner-occupied homes
- Legal partnerships to assist in landlord tenant disputes

Goal 3: Grow the overall financial security of residents living in this neighborhood.

Strategic focus areas:

- Non-predatory financial services
- Financial education programs
- Neighborhood business support for hiring local residents
- Expand job access for people who have been away from the workforce for extended periods of time
- Assistance with expungements
- Public and private transportation services

Goal 4: Enhance both formal and informal educational opportunities available for neighborhood residents.

Strategic focus areas:

- Regular educational programs focused on building self-sufficiency skills
- Leverage church and community resources to help improve K-12 educational institutions
- After-school programming in school facilities or at the church
- Job-training certifications
- Early childhood education in partnership with Day Early Learning and Arlington Woods School 99
- GED and college-readiness programming

PARTNERSHIPS

Sunstone at Arlington Woods ROCK Community Hub



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“But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19 KJV

from ESC to support the cost of outside consultants, technical expertise from attorneys, accountants and insurers, and internal staffing resources. Some of these costs were underwritten partially through grants, though most were included in the church’s annual operating budget.

Lesson Two: Partnerships

During the planning process, ESC assembled a list of dozens of potential community partners whose involvement could make a major difference in the outcomes of The ROCK Initiative. The list included everything from social enterprise investors to traditional lenders, legal services and homeowner educators to neighborhood association supporters and health and safety resources.

Because ESC understood that true impact would be realized by action on all fronts described in the strategic plan, not just activities addressing a single goal, finding multiple compatible partners became a critical need. Some were easy fits. Habitat for Humanity and the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic,

for example, share Christian values and bring invaluable technical expertise in home construction and legal services for low-income clients.

But many of ESC’s partners are secular organizations that share the same understanding of the complexities involved in resurrecting a neighborhood and the same vision for how to empower residents in transforming their own lives and their community. Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership, Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center, the Center for Leadership Development, Community Health Network, Financial Health Federal Credit Union and many other organizations have become essential partners in moving the plan’s initiatives forward.

ESC’s partners are also the individuals and organizations that have invested financially in The ROCK Initiative, either through an outright donation or through a true investment that generates a financial return. Developing all of these types of partnerships required staff time and, more importantly, clarity about

ROCK Fresh Market





Priscilla Avenue Paving

the vision and values inherent in ESC's undertaking. Having that clarity meant that some relationships never progressed beyond an initial meeting or two because it became clear in the discernment process that there was not a shared sense of purpose between ESC and some supposed funders.

ESC is committed to building on the relationships already established and to cultivating new partnerships and funding sources with like-minded individuals and organizations as The ROCK Initiative continues to unfold.

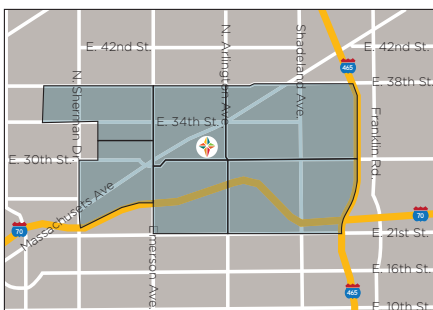
Lesson Three: Resources.

ESC had already committed significant resources annually in staffing its outreach ministries, but The ROCK Initiative suggested a bolder vision for discipleship that likely will require millions of dollars to carry out. Through careful management of annual stewardship donations, the congregation agreed to make a significant lead investment in the project: the donation of land for new homes as well as \$1 million

toward renovation and/or construction of affordable homes and apartments.

However, the church still needed to raise \$2.6 million from other investors and ensure the congregation's assets were protected in order to complete the first phase of work: acquisition and renovation of five homes, construction of five new homes, and development of a mixed-use facility (Sunstone at Arlington Woods) with 25 affordable 1/2BR apartments and ground floor space available for lease to community service organizations and small businesses that could provide much needed services and programs to the community.

A legal structure was developed with staff, church council, CPA's and attorneys, that involved creating limited liability corporations (LLCs), the ROCK Property Management LLC and Sunstone LLC, that are wholly owned by the church's existing nonprofit subsidiary, JEWEL Human Services. The team of church elders, executive team,



The ROCK Initiative (one-mile radius of Eastern Star Church)

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KEY ANALYTICS

Total Investment to Date Exceeds \$4.5 Million

Arlington Woods
Elementary School #99
Mentorship Program Volunteer Hours

1,917

Eastern Star Church
Care Center
Volunteer Hours

4,300

Sunstone at Arlington Woods
ROCK Community Hub
Volunteer Hours

700+

Sunstone at Arlington Woods
Apartments Current Residents

20

Sunstone at Arlington Woods
Apartment Inquiries

72

Habitat for Humanity
Eastern Star Church Build (Two Homes)
Volunteers

520

Sunstone at Arlington Woods
ROCK Fresh Market
Volunteer Hours

2,500+

attorneys, staff and other consultants also helped frame a community impact investment model to enable a private placement offering for potential investors. Within 60 days of launching the offering and after talking with 300 potential investors, ESC secured commitments for \$1.6 million from 29 investors and donors. The Executive Team then worked with a community-based lender to secure the final \$1 million.

This complicated financial structure was successful because the numbers actually worked: Sales of new homes will help pay back the church's initial investment and ensure that additional homes can be built, and rents from the Sunstone at Arlington Woods development are sufficient to service the debt and ensure a return on investor funds.

Lesson Four: Committed Volunteers

The involvement of volunteers (most of whom are members of ESC) in the various planning groups has been instrumental in the overall plan's success. In addition to evaluating the overall goals and strategies, volunteers have connected ESC to vendors, partners, and funding sources that have helped with implementation. And they continue to provide hands-on support that has significantly reduced the potential operating costs of some of the programs now offered through the initiative.

Examples include:

- Members of the congregation and key community partners helped leverage more than \$180,000 in funds and equipment to provide students at Arlington Woods Elementary School #99 with iPads and Chromebooks.
- Dozens of volunteers helped construct two Habitat for Humanity homes on land donated by ESC, the first two of 25-30 single-family homes that will be built near the church.

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- Church members provided materials and services at reduced cost for some of the initial construction projects.

- Visitors to the new ROCK Community Hub and ROCK Fresh Market are welcomed by volunteer greeters and checkout clerks.

Lesson Five: Build Trust

For tactical reasons, ESC's Strategic Planning Committee suggested focusing ESC's efforts on the mile radius around the church. First, church members and staff would see the work every day and be inspired about the difference their efforts were making. More importantly though, by concentrating a lot of activity in a relatively small area, it would be clearly apparent to people in the neighborhood around the church and in the broader Indianapolis community that ESC was serious about community development work. Getting to that point, however, would require ESC to develop new skill sets and to take the time necessary to build trust in a neighborhood where people were used to having their needs ignored.

Although ESC had already developed a reputation within the neighborhood for delivering traditional social services (food pantry, counseling services, school tutoring, etc.), the expansion to community development work was new. The planning team recognized that partnering with reputable organizations was a good way to help neighbors, funders and the broader community see that ESC was knowledgeable about the rigors of community development work and connected to the talent that could bring it to fruition.

Doing some smaller projects first – working with the Edna Martin Christian Center as part of a Faith & Action-funded grant, helping individual neighbors work through challenges in keeping up their homes, and working with residents to



Marilyn Griffin
Homeowner
Business Owner

Ms. Marilyn Griffin, along with her mother, receive keys to their first home (below). The home was also, the first home in The ROCK Initiative neighborhood development.

"Pastor Johnson's vision for the community, to rebuild this community... I want to be a part of that," says Griffin.

Griffin, the owner of Anointed Hands Hair Salon, is the featured stylist in Sunstone at Arlington Woods. She will work with other ROCK Community Hub partners to support area residents in need of life-advancement services.



establish a neighborhood association – helped ESC develop credibility with neighbors, funders, and the city. Those small steps helped build trusting relationships that made the big steps a little easier.

Hiring a Community Development Manager to focus on neighborhood needs was a significant commitment to demonstrate that ESC was serious about community work. However, dozens of other staff and volunteers at the church also spend significant amounts of time on building the relationships required to implement The ROCK Initiative. All of these positions are funded as part of ESC’s overall operations budget, in addition to the capital funding, the congregation has invested in the project.

Within the first 18 months, The ROCK Initiative has accomplished many things:

- Five homes in the process of renovation and five new homes were built in a one-block area along Priscilla Avenue just east of the church – and ESC was able to leverage its relationships with the City of Indianapolis to get the street repaved for the first time in 33 years.
- These attractive, affordable homes are being sold to many first-time homeowners, who have participated in an education program about home ownership and financial planning prior to purchasing the home.
- Affordable one- and two-bedroom rental properties are available in 25 apartments that make up the Sunstone at Arlington Woods development. This three-story facility also includes ground-floor space that offers a variety of services:
 - Financial Health Federal Credit Union, which focuses on serving residents in the urban core of Indianapolis, is helping residents save more, improve their credit scores and manage their money well.
 - ROCK Fresh Market, which is staffed by volunteers, offers fresh produce and other healthy food products at affordable prices (EBT/

SNAP accepted). With the opening of this market, the neighborhood surrounding the church is no longer considered a “food desert.”

-ROCK Community Hub provides meeting space as well as community services focused on helping residents rebuild their lives. The Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership, Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic, RecycleForce, Take Two and Go Consulting LLC provide training, coaching, and legal services to help residents overcome obstacles to self-sufficiency. The hub also includes Jomo’s Barbershop and Anointed Hands Hair Salon that support the ongoing needs of individuals as they prepare for job interviews and other development milestones.

-The Indiana Institute for Behavior Analysis provides therapy to help children and families with autism and related disorders.

- The Arlington Woods Neighborhood Association, established during the early stages of community planning, meets regularly and is poised to take on advocacy efforts on behalf of the neighborhood.
- IPS Arlington Woods Elementary School #99 students now have access to the same technology as students in better-funded school districts with investment and donations exceeding \$150k for technology enhancements.
- Nearly \$200,000 has been raised from private philanthropy sources to help underwrite some of the operating and program costs of The ROCK Initiative.
- The Faith & Action Project has given \$50,000 to the Double Forward Initiative, a project of The ROCK Initiative in partnership with Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership and Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic. This collaboration seeks to disrupt the cycle of recidivism and housing eviction in the 46218 zip code by helping participants gain financial stability and integrate educational and life-

-skills attainment, by assisting with housing placement, and by educating participants about smart rental practices.

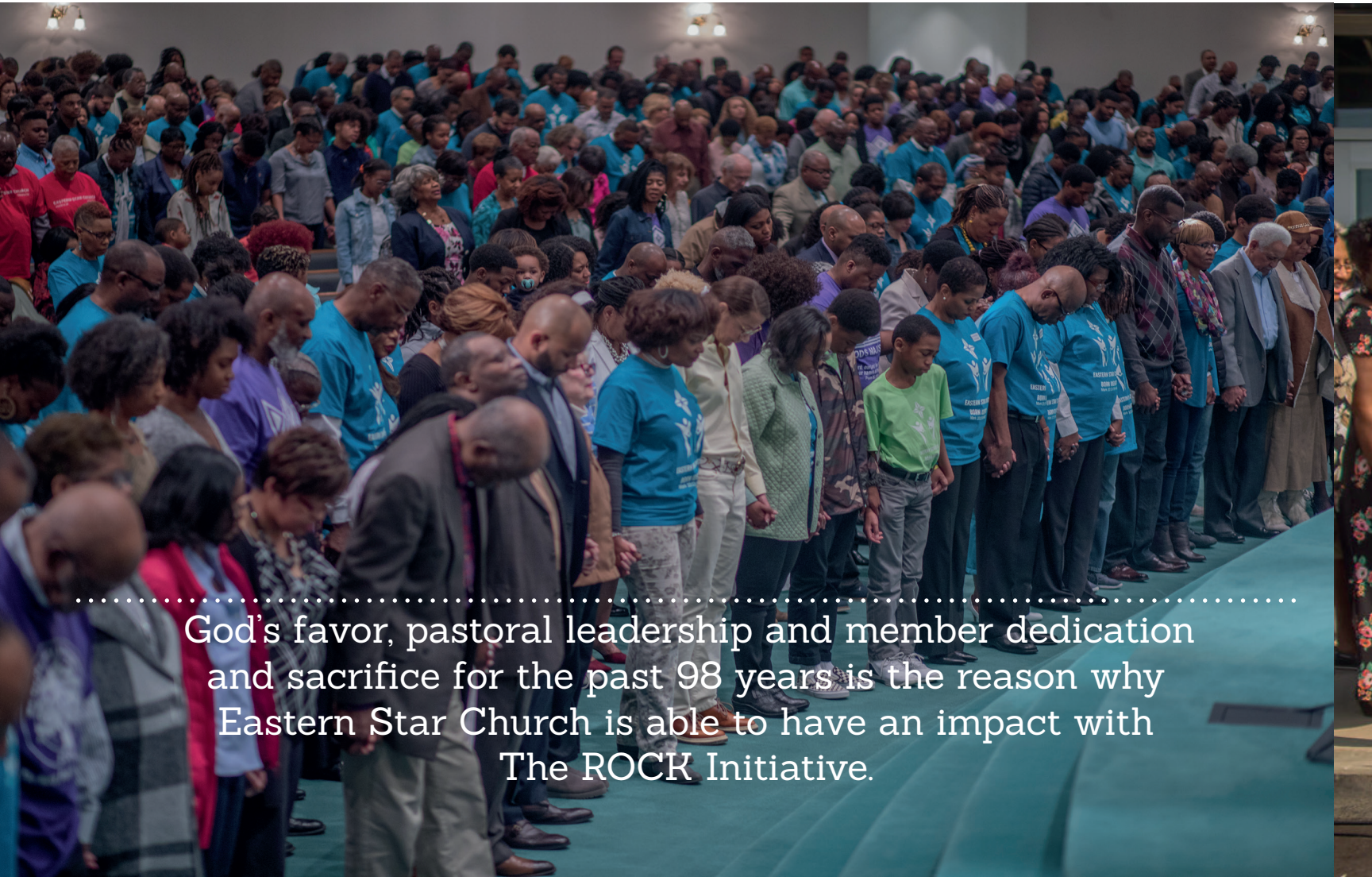
The Best Is Yet to Come

Momentum continues to build for potential new ROCK initiative programming:

- A screening health clinic with support by the medical ministry at ESC
- A community center developed in partnership with other organizations to serve children and youth in the areas of spiritual, vocational, life skills, physical, STEM, creative arts programming
- A small business incubator
- Additional community-based services
- Full-service grocer
- 50-75 additional apartment units
- An urban garden and cooking classes
- Additional wraparound services at Arlington Woods Elementary School
- Support for advancing education beyond elementary school
- Continued home renovations and new construction

The possibilities are endless, but the process ESC will use going forward is the same: careful planning, partnerships with like-minded organizations, solid business plans to attract investors and donors, volunteer involvement, and listening to the needs of area residents.

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 “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”
 2 Corinthians 9:8 NIV



God's favor, pastoral leadership and member dedication and sacrifice for the past 98 years is the reason why Eastern Star Church is able to have an impact with The ROCK Initiative.



PRISCILLA AVENUE NEW HOMES
2018