



common ground montgomery

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www.cgm.life



november
newsletter

2017



leading the cgm creed

leadership development program



hanging out before activities begin



cgm students





11th annual christmas store

December 2017 will mark Common Ground Montgomery's 11th Annual Christmas Store!

We have three very important goals for the Christmas Store:

1) Provide children in our programs the joy of receiving some toys for Christmas.

2) Affirm the dignity of adults in our community as they purchase toys at an affordable price instead of us giving them away.

3) Help empower the high school students in the Leadership Development Program by giving them an opportunity to invest back into their community through working and serving as they lead this year's store operation.

The Christmas Store dates are: Monday, December 18 - Thursday, December 21, 5:30 PM - 7 PM each day.

If you would like to donate gifts, our office can accept gifts Monday - Friday, 12:30 PM - 5:30 PM.

Please attach all receipts to the gift items so we can price them accordingly. Please don't wrap any gifts. And, in an attempt to reflect the students in our programs, if you are buying dolls or Barbie/ Barbie-like toys, please buy them in a myriad of brown flesh tones.

If you would like to help volunteer or want more information, visit us at **www.cgm.life/christmas** for details.



common ground shoals

CGM's vision statement has the end qualifier, "**that transforms Montgomery and beyond,**" and we see an aspect of that happening in the creation of our new affiliate organization, Common Ground Shoals, starting in Florence, Alabama. We are excited to see CGS' two directors, Sky Stewart and Lee Mayhall, begin their journey of mentorship, Biblical discipleship, and connecting relationships and resources across cultural and economic boundaries in West Florence.

Lee was a CGM intern during two recent Summer Camps, and he credits his time during those as the impetus for God giving him a vision for serving in an under-resourced and stressed community.

"I came to understand what it meant to love the whole person, spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally. Through gospel discipleship and studying God's word at CGM, I learned that having a heart for God goes hand in hand with having a heart for the poor, oppressed, marginalized, fatherless, and the widow. As God began to transform my heart, loving and serving the kids and community in Washington Park felt like a glimpse into the

center of God's heart. Even more, it made me feel like I was loving and serving Jesus himself, as He identifies with this community in Matthew 25, where He says, 'What you have done for the least of these my brothers, you have done to Me.'"

When Lee shared this vision with Sky, it rekindled a desire in him to see Gospel-centered justice and reconciliation in under-resourced and stressed communities, like the one he grew up in, that faced generational poverty, social injustices, and mass fatherlessness.

CGS will be their own 501(c)(3) organization, raising support in their own community to connect donors and resources and churches within the greater Muscle Shoals area.

If you, or someone you know, would like to get involved with CGS, you can find them at: www.cgs.life



CGS directors, Sky Stewart (left) and Lee Mayhall (right)

finding the sweet spot

In our lives we will experience the ebb and flow of seemingly good and bad experiences. Most times I've been able to look back at both situations and declare that God was with me through it all.

However, in my new role at Common Ground Montgomery, this is one of the only times I've been able to declare that I am in the sweet spot of His will while in the moment. I'm right where I am supposed to be. He is with me, and we will win.

The thing about this sweet spot is that it's not always comfortable. Being in the middle of God's will isn't about comfort level or the idea that challenges are nonexistent. It's knowing that you are doing exactly what you are supposed to be doing in the moment and that He is with you regardless of the circumstance. And, as many of you know, circumstances in this community can be rough.

I need not go into the daily challenges that our youth face along with their families. The metaphorical obstacle course that each resident of Washington Park and Gibbs Village must traverse beginning each morning with a walk out of their door. The crawl through the barbed wire (economics), the ropes course (failing education system), the climbing wall (broken family dynamics). But, this is our sweet spot.

In the past, our efforts have mainly been focused on equipping the young people in our community with the tools and mindsets necessary to endure and overcome the obstacle course each day. However, our perspective is shifting from simply equipping the individual to changing the dynamics of



justin hampton

executive director

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the course. Why not eliminate some of, if not all of, these obstacles that are unique to this community? Instead of beating the odds alone, let's change the odds. Is it harder? Maybe. But this is our sweet spot; He is with us, and we will win.

Heading into the end of the year our momentum is strong. In the midst of financial shortfalls, we've been left understaffed and creatively figuring out how to get the job done. Instead of hiring grade level specific teachers, we've tasked our young leaders (students in our Leadership Development Program) to act as tutors and teaching aides for their peers. They've risen to the challenge with discipline, faith in themselves, and a newfound expectation of what is possible.

In this first grading period, approximately one-third of our young leaders are on the A/B honor roll. The middle school group has a collective GPA of 2.6 with a goal of being above a 3.0 in their next reporting cycle. We are winning despite the challenges, and poised to accomplish even more.

As we progress into 2018 we will be creating new businesses, deploying adult residents into higher wage jobs in IT, and being as innovative as any other business incubator and community development organization in the world. God is with us.

Regardless of the challenges we face our focus is not on those challenges, but on the one who sent us to face them. The challenges don't dictate the sweet spot or the level of peace we experience in the midst of them.

Good and bad, for the past four months it has been clear that challenges will not cease, that God is with us, and we will win.

