WALLTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTRIES, DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL
CELEBRATE PARTNERSHIP WITH GRANT FROM THE DUKE ENDOWMENT

DURHAM, N.C. -- Walltown Neighborhood Ministries Inc. and Duke Divinity School will introduce a three-year partnership Friday, July 9, aimed at strengthening families and community life in the Walltown neighborhood of Durham.

The kickoff will be a neighborhood celebration at noon at Walltown’s St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church, 917 Onslow St. The event is free and open to the public and will feature brief remarks from Walltown neighborhood pastors Luther Brooks of St. James Missionary Baptist Church, Mel Williams of Watts Street Baptist Church, Brian Irving of Northside Baptist Church, Robert Daniels of St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church, Ed Henegar of Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church and Duke Divinity School Dean L. Gregory Jones. A light lunch will follow.

The celebration honors the Walltown churches’ community service and revitalization efforts as well as the “Walltown Families and Children Initiative,” a partnership between Walltown Neighborhood Ministries Inc. and Duke Divinity School.

Funded by a first-year grant of $288,299 from The Duke Endowment, a Charlotte-based charitable trust, the project will provide support for Walltown Neighborhood Ministries and field education and service opportunities for divinity school students.

“We’re excited about The Walltown Families and Children Initiative and the opportunity to partner with Duke Divinity School in ministry,” said Brooks, the St. James Missionary Baptist pastor. “This three-year cooperative project will strengthen family life, enhance parenting skills, develop academic achievement and life skills for children and youth, and build and strengthen relationships between members of the Walltown ‘neighborhood family’ -- the young and the old, African American and Hispanic, church members and the unreached,” Brooks said.
The Families and Children Initiative will feature three programs for neighborhood children, young families and the elderly, along with two programs aimed at strengthening the community’s identity and supporting neighborhood churches and their local efforts.

The Families and Children Initiative programs include:

- The Walltown Achievement by Youth (WAY): This after-school mentoring program also will include an eight-week summer camp for 75 young people, fully staffed from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. each day. Neighborhood service projects will be identified and completed by the program’s youth.

- Parent Education and Support (PEAS): Walltown congregations plan to partner with families transitioning from welfare to self-supporting work. Support and education will be offered for parents of young children (ages 1-5) by Child and Parent Support Services (CAPSS), a local organization. Health education and some nursing care will be provided through a health and nursing ministries program established by Duke Divinity School and the Duke School of Nursing.

- Rebuilding Our Neighborhood: Working together with Duke’s Center for Documentary Studies, the Walltown community will be invited to participate in a Community Identity Project and a History Recovery Project. Walltown neighbors will share in rediscovering their history and in creating signs and banners that mark the community’s boundaries.

- Care and Respect for Elders (CARE): Building on the WAY and PEAS programs, this component would provide transportation services for grocery trips and appointments, weekly social activities and health ministry through the health and nursing ministries program.

- Community Chaplaincy through Duke Divinity School: Seminarians from Duke Divinity School will live at a new mission house called “Neighbor House” and will work with the churches to support the WAY, PEAS and CARE ministries. They also will be actively involved in the life of the neighborhood churches. The program will hire a full-time director to provide oversight, supervision and financial management of the programs of the Walltown project.

The program grew out of three years of conversations among a group of Walltown churches that includes St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church, St. James Missionary Baptist Church and Northside Baptist Church and two nearby churches, Watts Street Baptist Church and Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church. Meeting together for Bible study, prayer and reflection, the pastors discussed their vision for eradicating poverty housing, increasing home ownership, caring for the elderly, improving support and education for parents and families, building relationships with Hispanic neighbors and fostering vigorous congregational life. The churches already have assisted in transforming a block of houses from dilapidated rental duplexes into attractive single-family homes.
The pastors’ group invited the Duke Divinity School to participate in their conversations about their dreams for their neighborhood. The new faith-based, multi-faceted neighborhood service project for Walltown parents and children emerged from those discussions.

“The Walltown/Duke Divinity School Families and Children Initiative represents a collaboration initiated by Walltown clergy, family and civic leaders to bring together the Walltown neighborhood and Duke Divinity School to strengthen families and community life,” said Jones, the Duke Divinity School dean. “We’re grateful for the support of The Duke Endowment in making this collaboration possible. We are excited about this ministry opportunity and look forward to the ways we can make a difference in people’s lives.”

The Rev. W. Joseph Mann, director of The Duke Endowment’s Rural Church Division, also voiced optimism about the project and its goals. “The Duke Endowment is pleased to be a partner with five churches of Walltown and Duke Divinity School in this collaborative effort. We hope that the Children and Families Initiative will assist communities as they identify and utilize their own strengths to work together in an imaginative way to increase the quality of life for children and families in their neighborhood.”

Walltown, bordered by Duke’s East Campus and Trinity Heights on the south and the Northgate Mall and the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics on the north, is one of 12 neighborhoods in the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership Initiative. The partnership initiative is a collaborative effort between local neighborhoods and Duke, focusing on community and economic development, public education, mentoring programs for local youth, health care and affordable housing.

Established in 1924 by N.C. industrialist and philanthropist James B. Duke, The Duke Endowment is one of the nation’s largest private foundations. Its mission is to assist the people of North Carolina and South Carolina by supporting selected programs of higher education, health care, children’s welfare, and spiritual life.

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For more information about volunteering with the Walltown Neighborhood Ministries/ Duke Divinity School Families and Children Initiative, call (919) 286-5676.

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