



December 2023

Creating A Neighborhood Where Kids Can Ride Their Bikes



*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. **And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.** Hebrews 12:1-2a*

I don't know about you, but sometimes I just don't feel like keepin' on. **We grow weary, tired, discouraged, and even disgusted.** We are simply worn out.

The past year has been hard, and it's been easy to be a pessimist. **But, we have also seen God move in mighty ways. In fact, this year, God taught us that we need to be hopefulists!**

A what? A hopefulist! A person who sees problems and the future through God's eyes. **Someone who understands that God is both with us in our problems AND goes before us in the future.**

UIM has persevered through Katrina, a house collapsing on seven volunteers, economic downturns, and so many shootings that we can even begin to number them. We have struggled through limited resources and continued tough times for our neighbors and friends. **God is with us in our problems. AND God goes before us in the future.**

We have had more decisions for Christ than in the past years. We were able to hire more teens and young adults. Participation in every one of our programs increased last year.

But the real heroes are our neighbors who have overcome so many obstacles and tragedies. The perseverance of our young adults – their “persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success” is heartwarming and inspiring. Here are some of their stories:



Santana, 20, started at UIM at age 7

He suffered through many hurtful words and actions and stayed to himself in high school. He was picked on because he didn't have the right stuff, and he constantly saw the violence that plagued and even killed his friends. **Santana didn't belong and was belittled,** causing him to suffer from low self-esteem. Compare the picture on the left of Santana as an 8-year-old camper compared to this reenactment photo two years ago. **He has grown – in height and confidence.** When asked how UIM has helped him, Santana shares, “UIM helps me persevere by providing a positive place that helps

me get my life right.” **Today, he dreams of owning his own house and discipling his**

kids. God is both with us in our problems AND goes before us in the future. And Santana is now a hopefulist!



Tyrone, 21, started at UIM at age 6

“We never unpacked as a family.” Can you imagine never being able to unpack your stuff because your family moved so often? Tyrone can. **Not surprisingly, he grew up angry, and drugs, especially marijuana, became his escape.** The summer of 2021, he was working at UIM, but he brought his addiction and anger to the job and didn't make it through the summer. God is both with us in our problems AND goes before us in the future. **Tyrone accepted Christ in**

November 2021 and has been clean and sober ever since. Last week, a staff member helped him get his first bank account. **He wants to be a youth pastor now and is teaching at SLAM (Jr. High Bible Study) occasionally.** Tyrone is a hopefulist, sharing, **“UIM helped persevere by knowing I am not alone and at UIM there is always somebody to listen to me.”**



Zametarius, 22, started at UIM at age 12

Like many of us, **Zametarius struggled with her relationship with God and others.** She was angry and confused as she tried to figure out her life and identity. But God is both with us in our problems AND goes before us in the future. **She approached us this fall wanting to get right with God and help people and now lives in one of our empowerment apartments where her leadership skills are apparent to all.** As a graduate from New Orleans Culinary & Hospitality Institute (NOCHI), **she wants to help UIM open a coffee shop in our**

youth center. This will increase our outreach to our neighbors, especially adults. Now a hopefulist, Zametarius shares, **“UIM helps me persevere by growing in faith, staying on the right path, and is a very safe place to screw up and ask questions and grow.”**

These are our three new part-time ministry assistants. **And you are a hopefulist now, too, because your partnership has helped so many persevere in face of tough times.** You have helped 70 families a month get enough food to fill their refrigerator once a month. Your donations have helped Zametarius have a place to stay and Santana to have a place to learn and grow. **Because of you, Tyrone has a place to learn to fulfill his dream.** Your partnership has also made UIM a place for 20 elementary students get support to attain grade level while learning more about Jesus. You and other hopefulists have helped us create a safe place for over 100 youth each week to play and be kids, and where another 40 junior and senior high students are mentored

and disciplined. Because of you, 150 children participated in our day camp, and 10 young adults had their first job. **Hopefulists like you created a place where the next generation of Christian leaders is being grown for their own neighborhood.**

Hopefulists are hopeful, even during some big goals and challenges. Though we didn't reach all our goals, we were able to:

- Hire three neighborhood young adults to be role models in training up the next generation of leaders;
- Be a larger presence in our community by opening the youth center one more night a week;
- Growing our youth ministry both in numbers and depth of discipleship;
- Completing many projects to keep our facilities safe and comfortably accessible to our youth;
- Begin formulating our transition plan to ensure continuous strong leadership.
- Had more children and youth in all our programs

And, because we are hopefulists, **God is both with us in our problems AND goes before us in the future, we are trusting God to deepen the foundation and outreach of UIM in 2024 by:**

- Continuing to Build our Leadership Development program by increasing our current employees to fulltime and hiring more neighborhood young adults to be role models in training up the next generation of leaders;
- A neighborhood coffee shop to extend our outreach to adults
- Opening our youth center on Saturdays;
- Getting a new roof on our ministry center to keep all of us safe and dry;
- Building a stable financial foundation that helps us start to implement our transition plan to new leadership.

Thank you for being a hopefulist and a partner. As we end this year, **would you please prayerfully consider partnering with us to bring the hope of Jesus to even more youth like Santana, Tyrone, and Zametrius** **Raising \$85,000 by year-end will position us to launch 2024 with even stronger presence of HOPE for our neighbors.** Our youth and their families may feel hopeless and lost, but as hopefulists, **they can having a living hope that doesn't spoil, perish or fade.**

Thank you for your continued partnership, and Merry Christmas!

In Anticipation of What Our Great God Will Do!

Pastor John Gerhardt

PS: Please give by December 31 to help us share God's living hope with our community. You can also give online at www.urbanimpact.org and clicking GIVE.

