

# **B.U.I.L.D.**

## **Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct Action**

### **What is BUILD?**

Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct Action (BUILD) is a tax-exempt, 501(c)3 community organization composed of 27 congregations in Fayette County, Kentucky. BUILD's purpose is to powerfully address community problems in the greater Lexington area by creating a self-sustaining, interfaith, interracial, proactive organization.

The goals of BUILD are:

- To develop a responsible organization to address local issues of concern to member congregations/groups, through a process of education, training, research and action.
- To build and deepen relationships among diverse segments of our community by bringing together groups from various cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds around common interests.
- To enable religious congregations and neighborhood groups to act on our shared values of human worth, dignity, and justice.

### **Why was BUILD created?**

*Micah 6:8 and Matthew 23:23 & 24 state that the Lord requires us “to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (faithfulness).”* At our congregations, we practice faithfulness through weekly worship, Bible Studies, and prayer. And we have a lot of ways to help individuals who are struggling, through mercy ministries like food pantries and clothing drives. But justice means holding *systems* accountable to solve the problems that affect thousands of people across our community. And we don't do this as well as we do mercy and faithfulness, because doing justice is not something we can do alone. We need power to do justice—power in large numbers of organized people. **BUILD was formed to bring congregations together so that they would have enough power to do justice in the community of Lexington. Our vision is 52/1. 52 times a year we gather together to worship. Once a year, our average weekly worship attendance should come together at the Nehemiah Action to do justice.**

### **How does BUILD decide what issues to work on?**

BUILD develops its issues through a **listening process**. Leaders at our congregations host small group meetings with other members of the congregation to discuss their concerns for their family and friends and our community. As a result, hundreds of problems surface and are brought to the Community Problems Assembly in the fall. At this assembly, leaders vote on problems they consider to be the most urgent.

We then conduct four months of **research** on these top-voted problems and take appropriate action to solve them. Members of our congregations do research about the problems by meeting with experts, and looking into solutions that have worked well in other places to solve the problems affecting our community.

### **How does BUILD take action on those problems?**

BUILD addresses community problems using the biblical model provided in **Nehemiah chapter 5**. When there was a severe famine in the land, the people of Jerusalem borrowed money to feed themselves and pay taxes. The money-lenders forced the people to mortgage their fields and even sell their children into slavery to repay their debt. This injustice angered Nehemiah, so he called all the people together for a great assembly, and he confronted the money-lenders with this injustice. When held accountable with the power of the great assembly, the money-lenders gave back all that they had confiscated. BUILD uses this same process to do justice in Lexington at the annual Nehemiah Action Assembly.

Members of BUILD's congregations meet with public officials to present them with a reasonable, well researched proposal, and invite them to the Nehemiah Action Assembly. At that Assembly, hundreds of people from the member congregations of BUILD participate in a face-to-face meeting with decision-makers and public officials, who are asked to make specific commitments for action. **The 2015 Nehemiah Action Assembly was attended by 1,746 people.**

## What has BUILD accomplished?

In its twelve year history, BUILD has made a real difference on a number of community problems:

### Affordable Housing

In 2014, BUILD gained a commitment from Mayor Gray to develop a plan for and champion the passage of an Affordable Housing Trust Fund with a dedicated funding source of 2 million dollars each year. This plan was approved by the city council and is on track to create an estimated 200 units of affordable housing each year.

### Drugs and Crime

BUILD won a Restorative Justice Program for youth who are using drugs and alcohol in our Family Court System. Three Family Court Judges, the Police Chief, the school system, the principal of our alternative school, and the Division of Youth Services were at our Nehemiah Action to commit to make this happen in Lexington. Over 150 young people have gone through this alternative to jail.

### Healthcare for the Uninsured

Due to the work of BUILD the Fayette County Health Department and other providers have supplied primary care to over 14,000 of Lexington's over 40,000 uninsured adults. In 2011 alone, nearly \$8 million of healthcare was provided to the uninsured in Lexington as a direct result of BUILD's efforts.

### Code Enforcement

Due to BUILD's taking action in 2007, the Code Enforcement Division agreed to step up its inspections of trailer parks in Fayette county, some of which had rotting floor, leaking roofs, and open sewage.

### Drug Treatment

BUILD discovered in 2006 that there was no drug treatment program for women in the Fayette County Jail, while the program for men was reducing the recidivism rate from 60% to 19%. BUILD got then-Mayor Teresa Isaac to put \$175,000 in the budget each year for a women's drug treatment program at the Fayette County Jail. To date, 430 women have been treated through this program.

### Fayette County Public Schools

Suspension Rates - BUILD worked with Fayette county Schools to reduce drastically high suspension rates at Bryan Station, Crawford, Leestown, Tates Creek, and Winburn middle schools. Due to the work of BUILD, Fayette County Schools changed the way they track suspensions so they can reduce the total number of suspensions and also reduce the number of students who are suspended from class.

### Public Transportation

BUILD got LexTran to start an "Employment Bus" which will take citizens to work during the hours the regular bus is not in service – this service began in August 2006.

### Ex-Offender Re-entry

BUILD got the circuit court clerk and head of the detention center to develop a plan to ensure inmates have state issued photo ID's upon their release.

### Drug Court

In 2014, BUILD won top-notch training for judges and attorneys in Fayette County to help them identify eligible candidates for Drug Court. Because of this training, 40 more people have gained access to treatment and this will save our city half a million dollars each year.

BUILD has followed up over the years to make sure that all of these commitments are met.

## What congregations are part of BUILD?

There are currently 27 member congregations of BUILD. The current co-presidents are Rev. Don Gillett (East Second Street Christian Church) and Kabby Akers (Mary Queen of the Holy Rosary).

*Consolidated Baptist Church  
Second Presbyterian Church  
St. Peter Claver Catholic Church  
Open Door Church  
Mary Queen of the Holy Rosary  
Phillips Memorial CME Church  
Greater Liberty Baptist Church  
Central Christian Church  
Maxwell Presbyterian Church*

*Faith Lutheran Church  
Shiloh Baptist Church  
Newman Center/Holy Spirit Parish  
Trinity Baptist Church  
Hunter Presbyterian Church  
Wesley United Methodist Church  
East Second Street Christian Church  
Historic 2<sup>nd</sup> Christian Church  
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church*

*St. Peter Catholic Church  
St. Paul Catholic Church  
Meadowthorpe Presbyterian Church  
Lexington Friends Meeting  
Cathedral of Christ the King  
Bethsaida Baptist Church  
Pleasant Green Baptist Church  
Star of Bethlehem Pentecostal  
First African Baptist Church*

# How to Make a Difference in our Community

by Sharon Donohue

We know from experience that in close elections—whether local or national—every vote counts.

Likewise, in fulfilling God’s mandate to “seek justice” and stand up as our brother’s/sister’s keeper, every person counts—our local officials take notice of an auditorium filled to capacity, and that’s when things happen that officials previously said “could not be done,” things like:

- Creating affordable housing units for more than 500 households in Lexington, who previously could not afford housing.
- A restorative justice program in our Family Court System for youth who are using drugs and alcohol—an alternative to jail, a program that demonstrates results in changing lives.
- Drug treatment for more than 400 incarcerated women, when previously a successful treatment program existed only for men.
- Primary healthcare to more than 14,000 uninsured adults after BUILD won a measure that resulted in services by Fayette County Health Department and other providers.
- Last year’s BUILD victory that achieved greater access to and more services available for those in need of mental healthcare. But more needs to be done. . . .

This year our social justice network, our BUILD coalition, is proposing initiatives on two fronts:

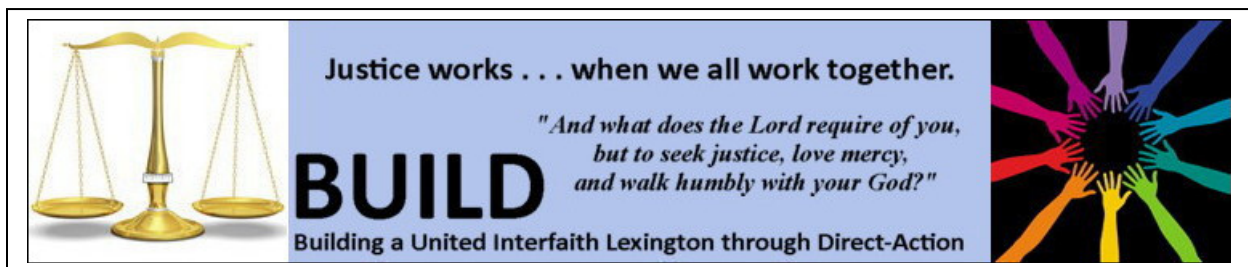
- **Crime and Violence:** In 2016, there were 101 shootings in Lexington that left 81 injured and 24 dead. Our friends and neighbors continue to suffer from these violent crimes while no discernable steps are being taken to curb this uptick in crime and violence. So BUILD has identified a program, created by the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC), that offers an evidence-based approach, a program that would be tailored to meet the needs of our city. The program NNSC recently designed for Cincinnati (Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence, CIRV) brought a dramatic reduction in crime and violence. The NNSC could craft a similar measure that works for Lexington—if our law enforcement agency would simply be willing to explore this and work with the NNSC to make that happen. BUILD is currently meeting with interested stakeholders who *are* listening, including the Vice Mayor.
- **Mental Health:** Last year BUILD advocated for and won increased treatment for those in need of mental healthcare. We gained not only the ability to treat more patients, but also more extensive services that can now be provided. But our research indicates that more needs to be done. In our efforts to craft the best proposal for our next step in mental healthcare, we have met with the Center for Evidence Based Practices at Case Western, ER professionals who deal directly with mental health, the Director of Bluegrass at the Detention Center, and the Director of Homelessness Prevention. All these professionals are helping to clarify what we still need and what would be the most strategic initiative to propose at this time.

In recent months, people who have never been involved in social justice issues are now looking for ways to stand up and be counted as an advocate for the marginalized, a defender of the defenseless. Some are people of faith, others are simply responsible citizens, obeying the inner voice that instinctively compels us to love our neighbors by standing in solidarity on their behalf. If you or someone you know is looking for a way to make a difference in our community, **save this date** and join us for this key event:

**The Nehemiah Action at Heritage Hall  
Tuesday, April 25, 7:00 p.m.**

**Sponsored by BUILD: Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct-action**

*For more info, contact Meg Campos, CTK Director of Social Outreach, at [mcampos@cdlex.org](mailto:mcampos@cdlex.org) or check out our BUILD info and vision doc at <https://cathedralctk.org/parish-social-ministry/>.*



*In 2016 a total of 1,860 attended the Nehemiah Action, including 205 from Christ the King. This year our parish goal is 225 and our BUILD goal is 2,000. Will you help us reach our goal?*