



*Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development*  
 October 2013  
 \$16, 182 pages, paperback  
 978-0-8308-3756-4

## Wayne's Story: A Tale of Two Activists

Long before we'd ever even heard of each other, John and I chose the same life verse:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

In January 1970, I was a high school junior. One night, barely a month before John was beaten in Brandon Jail, I awoke my mother at 1 a.m. to tell her that I'd had a strong sense that God was calling me to minister in the African American community. I felt it so strongly I wanted to quit high school and get started.

My mother advocated for patience, but she took me seriously, encouraging me to meet with our pastor. During that meeting, our pastor walked to his bookshelf and pulled out the book *Black and Free* by Tom Skinner. To this day, I consider it something of a minor miracle that this rural Iowa pastor had even heard of Skinner's book. I devoured that book as if it were written just for me. It answered all my questions and addressed all my concerns about how white people can be effective ministering in a "Negro" community. Among other things, it permanently etched the concept of "paternalism" in my mind as something to avoid.

My sense of calling never diminished from that day. If anything, it grew stronger. I spent the summer of 1970 ministering in an inner-city African American community in Chicago. In December I attended InterVarsity's Urbana Student Missions Conference, at which Tom Skinner was the keynote speaker. I considered him my "empowerer"; I attended all of Tom's workshops and soaked up his every word, though I never once approached him.

In the fall of 1971 I enrolled at Wheaton College, largely because it was close to Chicago. Whenever Tom Skinner got anywhere near the Windy City, I showed up to hear him. I never asked questions, though, because I didn't know what to ask. I just sat at Tom's feet and learned.

While at Wheaton I took advantage of opportunities to volunteer in Chicago. Meanwhile, in 1973, at the historic Chicago Declaration Conference, evangelicals declared their support for social action and thus for wholistic Christian ministry.

During my final semester at Wheaton, in 1975, I went to chapel to hear John Perkins, a speaker whose name I'd never heard. I was moved almost to tears as John described his ministry. It was everything I had been thinking about, dreaming about, preparing for.

Shortly after graduating I relocated to North Lawndale, one of Chicago's poorest and most



# BOOK EXCERPT

crime-infested areas. I became a teacher and coach at Farragut High School with no thought of ever being a pastor. I merely wanted to lead Bible studies among high school youth, lead them to Christ and love them wholistically, as Christ loves them. (Eventually the youth I was working with convinced Anne and me to start a church, and they persuaded me to be its pastor. The full story of the early years of Lawndale Community Church is told in my book *Real Hope in Chicago*.) It was at Farragut where I earned the moniker “Coach,” a nickname I’ve never relinquished.

More than a few people—white and black alike—called me crazy for moving to such a dangerous part of town. But I was convinced it was what I was called to do. I was candid about this calling with Anne, the woman I wanted to date; I told her that if she could not see herself living in Lawndale, there would be no sense in dating—that was a deal breaker. Anne was not deterred, though.

I had met Anne at a funeral in Indianapolis; she was the girl of my dreams. I fell in love with her immediately; she was everything I had hoped for: strong character, deep faith and a discerning spirit that has helped me tremendously over the years. God has done exceedingly abundantly beyond what we have asked or thought—that is what Anne has been for me. We were married in June of 1977.

Even though both of us had second thoughts when our house in Lawndale was broken into on our first night there together, we stayed the course. That night I thought God was possibly giving me a sign that bringing my wonderful wife to live with me in Lawndale was a mistake. When I expressed this to her she responded, “I love you, and I want to live here.” Thank God for Anne, or we probably wouldn’t be living here today.

About a year after my first encounter with John Perkins, I had my second, when I read his book *Let Justice Roll Down*. Although some in the Christian press had reported on John’s beating in Brandon Jail in 1970, for the most part he’d ministered in obscurity for ten years; it’s a point I like to make today among those, including mentees, who are in pursuit of instant recognition. His first book, however, put John on the map. This book really crystallized how to help the people of Lawndale; it was comprehensive, wholistic and nonpaternalistic. I knew in my heart that this was the philosophy of ministry God was calling me to.

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Neither of us knew in 1976 how tightly our lives and ministries would in time be woven together. The Christian Community Development Association was still more than a decade away from being formally founded.

— Adapted from Chapter 1, “A Tale of Two Activists”



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**Wayne Gordon** (D.Min., Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the founding pastor of Lawndale Community Church in Chicago, Illinois, and chairman/president of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). In 1975 Wayne moved to North Lawndale, located on Chicago's west side. At that time, North Lawndale was the 15th poorest neighborhood in the United States. Wayne and his wife, Anne, along with some local high school students, founded the Lawndale Community Church. Today, LCC has over one thousand worshipping families, and Wayne continues as pastor.

In over thirty-seven years of ministry, "Coach," as he is affectionately known, has played a key role in numerous community development initiatives, including the Lawndale Christian Health Center, the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation and the CCDA. He currently serves as adjunct professor of urban ministry at Northern Seminary (Illinois).

In 2011 he was given the William Wilberforce Award by the board of directors of Breakpoint and the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview. He is the author of several books, including *Real Hope in Chicago*, *Who Is My Neighbor* and *Leadership Revolution*.

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**John M. Perkins**, the son of a sharecropper, grew up in Mississippi amid dire poverty and rampant racism. Though he had fled to California after his older brother was murdered by a town marshal, he returned after his conversion to Christ in 1960 to share the gospel with his community.

His leadership of civil rights demonstrations earned him repeated harassment, beatings and imprisonment. However, in recent years Perkins has received recognition for his work with seven honorary doctorates from Wheaton College, Gordon College, Huntington College, Geneva College, Spring Arbor College, North Park College and Belhaven College. He continues to speak and teach around the world on issues of racial reconciliation, leadership and community development.

Perkins is the founder of Voice of Calvary Ministries in Mendenhall, Mississippi, Harambee Ministries in Pasadena, California, and the Christian Community Development Association. His books include *Let Justice Roll Down*, *With Justice for All*, *A Quiet Revolution* and *Linking Arms, Linking Lives*.