

Thus, the heart of Steps has been to present the gospel in word and deed to the ones in most desperate need of it. As one stanza of Charles Wesley's First Hymn 'Where shall my wondering soul begin' goes;

*Outcasts of men to you I call,  
Harlots and publicans and thieves;  
He spreads His arms to embrace you all,  
Sinners alone His grace receive.*

In the ten years that have ensued since its inception, Steps has seen a lot of changes. Changes to the structure, dynamics, staff and affiliations must be made over time in every organization, but the heart must remain the same. In 2008, an official vision statement was written to encapsulate that heart and purpose. It is 'Transforming families by living Christ'. That's our end and our means wrapped up in a short phrase. The caveat of this statement is that we must not misunderstand our role because of the simplicity of the statement. Firstly, we know that only Christ can transform a person and thus a family, but we are the catalysts. Secondly, we know that living Christ without speaking His message is not enough, part of our living Christ is to speak Christ also.

Ten years later Steps Ministries is continuing to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. We see ourselves as a part of the wider Church at Buffalo and could not exist without her amazing support and guidance.

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## The Story of STEPS

Last year, December 2015, Steps Ministries celebrated 10 years since its opening in December 2005. In my travels there are two questions that I get asked the most. The most common question by far is 'How did you end up in Buffalo from England?' That's a question to be answered elsewhere in more detail, but the second most common question is what I am going to answer in this article. 'What is Steps?'

To answer this fully I have to go back in time before Steps was born and share the story of a small group of Christians with a big dream for Buffalo. The story starts with a building in a small community in the city of Buffalo. 1221-1223 Seneca Street had had a number of different uses before, in 1970, it was purchased by a ministry out of Philadelphia, PA called Teen Haven. Nestled into the very center of the small neighborhood of Seneca Babcock the building was in a perfect location for Teen Haven to provide a safe place and Christian programming for children and teens. And that they did faithfully for over 30 years!

At the turn of the millennia, Teen Haven decided to close down their Buffalo center and focus their attention on the needs in Philadelphia. I had the privilege of visiting the original Teen Haven center in Philadelphia and meeting the current Director. I was encouraged to find that they are doing a great work there amongst at risk children. As the staff brought their Buffalo ministry to a close they prayed that there would be someone to pick up where they had left off. A man who had been involved in Teen Haven bought the building with the hope that further ministry would be birthed there. The building was donated to a ministry that would ensure that happened, Christians United for Buffalo (CUB).

At the time, Pure for God Ministries (PFG) were working to train young people for kingdom work, placing them in churches around the area to learn in vocation. Collaboration ensued between CUB, PFG and a local church that was already doing Christian work in the neighborhood, Seneca Street Church (SSC). In preparation for the ministry work to be done there, the members of CUB renovated and decorated the building. The

downstairs section is split into two rooms, one smaller and one larger, which were to be used for Christian ministry in the neighborhood. The two apartments upstairs would be for the three young women in PFG's program, pioneering the work, to live in. Their names were Kelly, Ute and Connie, all in their twenties.

The three girls, trained and overseen by PFG, worked closely with the church and sought how God might use them to bring light to a dark area. At the time, the neighborhood, though filled with many big-hearted people, was facing major challenges. The houses were mainly rented, with very few home owners. Families were broken, with many domestic abuse cases. The main entrance into the neighborhood was guarded by two adult stores, supplying a great demand. There were racial tensions and drunken fighting in the streets. Drug and alcohol abuse was a major issue widespread in the area. Many of these challenges continue today though one of the adult stores has been knocked down and replaced by a coffee shop.

The girls decided not to start anything right away, but to pray and seek God as to what He would have them do there. As they walked the neighborhood and prayed they began to see a trend. There was a group of kids that would go to the church, but there was another much bigger group that wouldn't. They were of varying ages from the twenties to young teens. They would stay out late, sitting on the steps of the church, drinking and smoking, fighting and damaging property. On nights when they were particularly rowdy, the girls would be able to hear them talking loudly and shouting racial slurs. It quickly became clear to them who should be the focus of their evangelistic efforts.

So in December 2005 the girls launched the ministry. They had two nights a week where young people could come into the building, be fed and play games. On one of the nights there was a Bible study before dinner. Alongside this, the girls would go out onto the streets and talk to the youth who would congregate on the steps and invite them to come into the building on Friday and Saturday nights. They decided to call the ministry 'Steps' because this haven was to be the new place that the teens would congregate.