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A Project of Lexington Cooperative Ministry Inc.

Cooperation: A Story of Hope and Joy
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It is too easy to feel and see despair. Headlines tell of stagnant if not rising unemployment and homelessness is an impending threat for far too many. Social service agencies vie for too few dollars while at the same time billions of dollars were spent on the recent elections in which candidates sparred with pointed fingers and ugly words. We're told the economy is the culprit. We're told we might have to wait a long time for brighter days when things will improve. Because it is too easy to be a cynic, I want to tell you a story of hope and joy.

I believe that the days we have left are the most important days of our lives. For several years I had the dream of creating a home for old women who do not have much money. I wanted to create a home so that the last years of a woman's life could be comfortable and enriching rather than worrisome and lonesome.

Ironically, it was the bad economy which provided the opportunity to make this dream take shape. Two adjacent houses on Delaware Ave., near downtown were for sale and I could afford the down payment. One day as I stood on the steps and peered in the windows, I heard an echo of a children's sermon that has been part of my family's legacy since I heard it 50 years ago. I heard, "Reverend Wilcox said to share." So about a year ago, December 4, 2009, I purchased the houses in the name of Lexington Cooperative Ministry Inc., a non-profit homespun creation.

Since the purchase, I have been flying by the seat of my pants and a prayer. The houses were in terrible shape due to termite damage and years of neglect. Yet here is the good news. In spite of the terrible economy, the houses are in process of becoming The Legacy Home, a safe and affordable place for women to live together by sharing space and resources so each may age in community with the support of one another.

In truth, I do not know how to build a house. But I do know how to ask for help. Help arrived in an abundance of ways. When asked, people have said, "Yes!" Paul Davis Restoration, under the sound and practical direction of Joe Lucchese, is our project manager. Dozens of good natured volunteers have shown up in all kinds of weather to fill dumpster after dumpster with aged drywall, termite eaten flooring, and soiled carpet. Dupree Catering feeds us. Clay Ingels provided windows and doors. Interior design and website design has been provided by "house." And foot by tedious foot, Don Glover drew the plans. And then in a spirit of celebration and cooperation, Debra Hensley offered to throw her Social Stimulus Party for us.

Yes, it's been a year of hope and joy. I have experienced the joy of receiving a check for several thousand dollars just in the nick of time to pay a construction bill. And, there was the moment when I found myself in tears of profound gratitude when I experienced a live time demonstration of the parable of the widow's mite in the form of a gift of a crumpled ten dollar bill. You simply cannot tell me it is not possible to build a home in the worst of times when people share resources no matter what the size.

But there is more. The Legacy Home is the first model of cooperative living in a community setting for people of low wealth in Lexington. Thus, The Legacy Home Ministry serves as a place of learning, wonder, and research. In collaboration with the assistance of Laura Hatfield with The UK Department of Community Engagement, we were introduced to students and faculty as resources of knowledge. For instance, the home's backyard served as a blank slate for landscape architecture students' designs for the deck and garden space. Doctoral students in the Graduate Program in Gerontology now have opportunity to learn how cooperative living in community affects how people age, not to mention answer the abundance of questions about governance and policy in cooperative living. Thus, the cooperative collaboration and sharing of knowledge also brings the Legacy Home to life.

We are operating on a paper thin budget and build only as the money comes in. We minimize borrowing money so the women's rent can be kept to a very minimum. I used the word "Cooperative" for good reason. For me, this past year has been filled with more moments of joy, hope and grace than moments of angst or discouragement. I believe in the universal truth that everyone benefits when resources are shared in true cooperation and genuine concern for others. So, even on days when I begin to doubt it can be possible, I can actually see and be a part of what I have always believed is true: Good things, actually very good things, happen when we share resources. It is seemingly a paradox that we are remodeling a house at a time when resources are in short supply so that women of low wealth cannot only live, but thrive, in a time when resources are in short supply. It is possible! I see it happen every day.

I want to extend bountiful thanks to everyone who has supported Lexington Cooperative Ministry Inc. in our first endeavor to build the Legacy Home. I am joyful and grateful.