Hope and Healing
at Liberty Community Church

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives ... to let the oppressed go free ... ”

A ministry of hope and healing is changing lives in north Minneapolis as Kwanzaa Community Church celebrates its new name: Liberty Community Church, Where Freedom is Proclaimed.

The seven principles of Kwanzaa are consistent with the church’s values, but Kwanzaa is a secular holiday and the congregation wanted its name to reflect its mission of liberation. The choice was made after two years of Bible study and discernment led by Pastors Ralph and Alika Galloway and facilitated by Julie Carver. The congregation is inaugurating its new name this spring.

What does liberty look like in the church’s mission? How is freedom being proclaimed?

For children and youth, it means a safe and loving place where they can gather after school: the 21st Century Academy. According to Pastor Alika, the main goal of the Academy is to form good relationships. “It’s not rocket science to love a child. Loving children is what we do at Liberty.” A graduate of the Academy said at a recent meeting, “I wouldn’t be here today except for the 21st Century Academy.”

Many of the scholars are survivors of childhood trauma. Tyshawn Blackwell, a Liberty deacon, works at the Academy as a trauma specialist. He speaks with passion about the ways he helps the scholars draw upon their inner resources for healing.
As they form relationships with the scholars, staff and volunteers work with them to close the opportunity/achievement gap. “I want all scholars to look into the mirror and see brilliance,” says Dr. Ross Velure Roholt, consultant for the Academy and youth specialist at the University of Minnesota. Tutors assist with homework and, after supper, the Rev. Sarah Bigwood of Valley Community Church leads an exciting math program that challenges scholars to solve real problems, like calculating the square feet of the sanctuary floor. The good news is that many scholars have raised both their grades in school and their test scores.

Every summer the church sponsors programs for children and youth. This summer’s programs will include Freedom School at the church for scholars in kindergarten through the eighth grade and a high school program at University of Minnesota Urban Research Center (UROC). Freedom Schools are based on a model developed by the Children’s Defense Fund and are named for the Freedom Schools founded by volunteers in the South during the civil rights movement. At Freedom School children learn to love books as they improve their reading skills.

Senior high scholars will carry out a research project designed by University of Minnesota researcher, Dr. Lauren Martin and Tracy Leidl. Last summer’s senior high scholars studied health issues in their community. This included an in-depth interview with Gretchen Musicant, Minneapolis Commissioner of Health.

What does liberty mean to women who come to Northside Healing Space at Liberty Community Church? At a recent Critical Conversation where participants discussed sex trafficking, a pastor said; “I thought we had put an end to slavery.”

Northside Healing Space offers a safe, caring place for women who have been trafficked or who are engaging in the sex trade. Women come for a weekly luncheon where they share conversation and concerns with spiritual advisors. They also have the opportunity to meet with a substance abuse counselor.
According to studies conducted by Dr. Loren Martin, the average age when girls enter the sex trade is thirteen. Some are as young as eleven. For these girls, engaging in sex means survival, a good meal or a place to sleep. Childhood trauma, homelessness, poor mental health, and poor achievement in school all contribute to this form of slavery. According to Pastor Alika, preventing girls from beginning to trade sex is a primary goal in all of Liberty Church’s work with girls and young women.

The ministry of Liberty Church extends beyond the north Minneapolis community. For several years Alika and members of the Presbytery Liberty Church Mission Team have sponsored Critical Conversations. Members of churches across our Presbytery have gathered to bring a Christian perspective to subjects like racism, sex trafficking, and the achievement/opportunity gap.

The Confession of 1967 calls the church to a ministry of reconciliation. “God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation ... are the heart of the gospel in any age.” (The Book of Confessions, 9.06) Through its ministry of hope and healing, Liberty Community Church is living and proclaiming the gospel to people who have been marginalized in our society. Thanks be to God for this faithful ministry!