



PROFILES OF HOPE: Meet Ray, an IOH Founder:

I was the pastor of the church that sits in front of IOH. It was the Advent Lutheran Church, and I started there in 1979.

I grew up learning to serve the community, and was very involved in outreach. I was working with a nun named Sister Carolyn Oberkirch from OLA at the Doorstep Mission when we realized we needed something more permanent to serve homeless families. Folks were sleeping in the church, yet we had all this property behind the church not being used. We decided to use it for good, and the plan to build IOH was set in motion.

The congregation had a true heart of gold; they were all for it. Sister Carolyn spearheaded the whole thing. I set up the land lease. When we started, we had no idea where the money would come from. Then one benefactor donated \$100,000 seed money – and we worked to raise the other \$150,000. We kept moving forward, one donation at a time – and here we are, 25 years later. I still remember the dedication date: 2/22/92. We had about 30 congregations in attendance, community leaders, city officials - all here on the front porch. It was a great celebration.

Many years later, after several moves and job changes, I was working as a real estate broker. Deborah and I put our heads together, thinking “Why should the families move into an apartment and pay rent when they could buy a home and build some equity?” One lender said ‘yes’, and that was that. The first graduate that purchased a home was a single mom with a young son. No one in her family had ever owned a home – they had all rented. She sobbed as she signed the papers. “A year ago my son and I were living in a refrigerator box in NYC, and now I own my own home!” I have never forgotten those words of joy.

Deborah tells me that since then, 46 other families have gone from homeless to homeowner at IOH. Now I am back in Atlanta and ready to help IOH celebrate the next 25 years. Let’s get started!