

## **Project Garrison Agency History**



### **Mission and Initial Founding**

From its founding in 1995 by two area clergy, Rev. Basha Jordan and Rev. Hoffman Brown, Project Garrison has developed a number of partnerships with other area churches and their congregations, community associations, residents, other community stakeholders and government agencies. There were 42 churches involved with Project Garrison as well as representation from the Muslims. The organization offers public safety programs, economic development initiatives, computer technology services, and a youth mentoring program geared particularly toward improving the quality of life for at-risk children, youth, economically disadvantaged families and other people affiliated with the communities it serves. Although Project Garrison's mission statement may not have a statement of faith, Mr. Andrew Gaskins, President and Interim Executive Director, feels that his faith aligns with the organization and the principles of that faith are noted as the core values of the organization - "in our core values we profess and believe in Jesus."

The goals of Project Garrison are: to advance the delivery of state-of-art technology services to people in northwest Baltimore; to advance the delivery of human services and programs focusing upon enhancing the full-time mentoring program called the Meet-Me-Halfway Mentoring Village Center; and to facilitate a coordinated and comprehensive public safety initiative called the Northwest Baltimore Drug Free Community Coalition.

Reflected in the name of one of Project Garrison's earlier events is religious symbolism. An annual community organizing mobilization event called the Jericho Walk impacted over two thousand community residents and stakeholders over a seven-year period. Churches of different denominations in the community were all participants in the initiative. This activity led to the garnering of corporate, foundation and political support ranging from Baltimore City Council persons, Maryland State government officials to United States Congress and Senate representatives. Currently, a similar event known as the Recovery Walk, mobilizes the community around public safety issues related to drug use and recovery. Both events have as

a focus social justice. Although it has a secular name, prayer is also a part of this event, however, not as many churches are involved.

*Joshua marched around Jericho 7 times. So we had the Jericho walk for 7 years. In those 7 years – we started off with a handful of folk. By the time it ended up we had over a thousand people marching and had other agencies giving us money to help with this project. Many times we had persons marching with us who were members of the various churches who were in recovery or whose children had died as a direct result of an overdose or suicide. We had persons who had AIDS who were running recovery houses who were in recovery marching with us, getting things done, sitting at the table and making plans for how we were going to make the Jericho walk better. What were we going to do? It just kind of catapulted.*

Although not proselytizing, Rev. Jordan believes that people will come into the churches when they know that they have an advocate in the pulpit.

Wayland Baptist Church, under Rev. Brown, is now the home of Project Garrison. The organization was initially hosted by the Garrison Boulevard United Methodist Church, pastored by Rev. Jordan. Mr. Gaskins calls the relationship with the Baptist church the “spiritual covering” for the organization. Now instead of the donated space provided by the earlier United Methodist churches, a rental donation, via a lease agreement, is given to the Baptist church, as Project Garrison is now self-sufficient. There is no sponsoring religious entity for Project Garrison; Mr. Garrison calls it “sponsored by God.” He sees that the faith and tenets of social justice are found in how people are treated and in the programming that addresses the needs of the people in the community.

*When we first got started we made a presentation to the administrative council of the United Methodist Church to form a 501(c)3 for a project called Project Garrison. In that we stated the purpose for what we wanted to do and the Administrative Council gave us the approval or the authorization to go ahead and formulate our own board of directors and activities with a requirement or an expectation that we would periodically report back and keep them informed, but it wasn't a rigid requirement.*

Rev. Jordan felt that the adjudicatory body for the United Methodist Church, the Administrative Council, did not initially support the work proposed by the formation of Project Garrison. But, seeing the support of the community and the inter-denomination and inter-political and inter-sociological dynamics of the event, the area bishop came on board.

*Anytime we have a march where you have a thousand people marching and you have the governor marching with you and the senators and the mayor of the city marching with you. Maybe I think it is convenient and expeditious for you to come and support the event.*

Under Wayland Baptist Church, there is an Assembly of Servants (similar to deacons and trustees) to which a report is made, but they are not an oversight body, the board of Project Garrison is. When Project Garrison first started the desire was for it to be led by spiritual leaders, where they would be more active in helping to bring about this organization and its change. Eventually that did not work, but the lay leaders took the ball and ran with it and made it work with the support of both Reverend Jordan and Reverend Brown.

Project Garrison is considered faith-based because of its founding fathers, the spiritual leaders who founded the organization and its philosophy and its purpose. It is ecumenical but it definitely is a Christian or Christ-centered organization. Even though the main source of funding is from the federal government, those Christ-centered beliefs are exemplified in

*how the employees/volunteers are treated... how we treat one another, clients, customers. We also use it in programming specifically. For example we have also a volunteer income tax provider working with our Internal Revenue Service where we do free income tax preparation for low to moderate income. This will be our third year. In our first two years of doing it we - each year we have encountered individuals that come in for tax preparation, but need counseling, prayer and support and we do it. They ask for it. We don't force it... What we are about is helping to be a messenger and deliverer of social justice in the communities that we serve. When we are dealing with some of our non-Christ centered partners such as Muslims, we try not to offend them, but yet understand that we are Christ centered.*

The board of Project Garrison was initially made up of members of the partner churches. As time went by, more of the community got involved and some of the board members were from outside of the churches. There was an interest in maximizing the involvement of the community. Program volunteers come not only from the churches, but from the community, from the schools in which they have programs, and from all kinds of sources. They are also a member of the Volunteer Central from which they can put in a request for projects and get volunteers. Right now about 25% of the church members use the services of Project Garrison.

In 1994 Meet-Me-Halfway Village joined Project Garrison. Meet-Me-Halfway is a full-time school-based mentoring program for "at-risk" students attending three public schools in northwest Baltimore: Garrison Middle, Forest Park HS and KASA Academy. Wrap-around services include regular communication between program staff and parents, support groups, referral services and adult education classes; delivery of parenting classes, technology training and financial literacy/including assistance with automated income tax preparation free of charge for low income families. Other services to youth include: introduction to vocational careers such as cosmetology, welding, publishing and basic computer skills training.

The partnerships of Project Garrison are extensive, encompassing religious, government, educational, political and business arenas. They have included: Adams Chapel AME Church, First Corinthian Baptist Church, Gwynn Oak United Methodist Church, Wayland Baptist Church, New St. Mark Baptist Church, Good Shepherd Baptist Church, The Lord's Church, US States Attorney's Office of Maryland, U.S. Dept of Justice - Weed & Seed - Community Development Capacity Office, Internal Revenue Service, Institute for Law and Justice, Microsoft Unlimited Potential, Abell Foundation, Annie Casey Foundation, Associated Black Charities, Commonwealth Foundation, Family League of Baltimore City, Inc., Goldsmith Family Foundation, NW Baltimore Drug Free Community Coalition, NW Development Roundtable, Meet Me Halfway Village, Bon Secours Baltimore Health Systems, CareFirst Commitment, Harambee Treatment Center, The Hidden Garden at Park West Health Systems, Baltimore City Community College, Garrison Middle School, Hilton Elementary School, Forest Park HS, New Medenah Academy, Maryland State Arts Council, Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America, National Council Alcoholism and Drug Dependency -MD Chapter, Baltimore City Northwest District Police Department, Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems, Inc., Open Society Institute, National Women's Prison Project, Inc., B.R.I.D.G.E. WBC Community Development Corporation, The Northwest Development Corporation, Inc. Eaton Enterprises, LLC and others.

## Finances

The initial founding denomination of Project Garrison was largely the United Methodist Church and support came from the pastor of Garrison Boulevard United Methodist Church and also from the district superintendent as well as the neighboring churches. Partnering churches made small financial contributions. There was also a grant in the beginning from the United Methodist Church. Small contributions also came from members of the partnering congregations. That continued while Project Garrison was run by volunteers. The initial federal grant was received – funding for five years from the federal Weed and Seed grant which provided the resources to start a technology center – the computer labs. That led to other federal grants including one for \$50,000 from the Targeted Capacity Capital Fund, which was used to help do some of the mapping for the Northwest Baltimore Drug Free Community Coalition. Another federal grant was from the Institute of Law and Justice for a public housing safety initiative. There are also a few grants from local sources, such as a grant from The Family League of Baltimore City for the school-based program, *Meet Me Halfway*. There are also some foundation and corporate grants.

Primary funding up to this point has been through grants, which allows for hiring of staff, which is done on a contractual basis. Key staff are still volunteers. The current strategic plan calls for diversification of resources as a means of sustaining the organization. There is a volunteer whose focus is on developing sustainability for Project Garrison. Some of the computer training programs are now fee-based. Five percent or less of funding is now received from the faith partners.

*And something else too that we used to do when we first started - one of the things that we would do annually around just before lent starts we would do a pancake supper to help raise funds. And the day after the pancake supper which would be the first day of lent and we would do an ecumenical service with the other denominations and that offering would also go to support Project Garrison. We stopped doing the joint services I guess about 5 years ago. And a lot of that reason why we stopped is because a lot of the leadership in the churches changed.*

It seems that some of the partner church leaders took exception to Project Garrison receiving funds from the government and became disengaged.

The organization has never owned its own property. When they started they were at the Garrison Boulevard United Methodist church in donated space and then at St. Mark's United Methodist Church where they did not have to pay rent. They are now housed in a property owned by Wayland Baptist Church, where they have a lease agreement that will eventually go to market rate.

## **Timeline**

- 1910 Founding of Wayland Baptist Church
- 1995 Project Garrison, Inc., founded as a faith-based, community-based nonprofit organization, composed of spiritual leaders, worshippers, residents and other community stakeholders, who unite and collaborate for the purpose of advancing public safety initiatives, faith based initiatives, economic development initiatives and human services in northwest Baltimore.
- 2002 Jericho Walks to mobilize Garrison Boulevard Community to address issues such as drug abuse, crime, prostitution
- 2004 Partnered with Department of Justice, Community Capacity Development Office and others to implement a five-year Weed and Seed Strategy. Meet-Me-Halfway Village joins Project Garrison, Inc.
- 2006 Recognized for work in the area reducing drug trafficking and other illegal activities.
- 2009 NW Baltimore Drug Free Community Coalition Recovery Month - A Project Garrison Public Safety Strategy
- 2009 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program begins.



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