My family has lived on the same street for almost 10 years. This is the longest we have lived in one place. We have watched the children in our neighborhood grow from toddlers to teenagers. We have celebrated life milestones together, and grieved life’s losses together. However, when we first moved into our neighborhood, we were new. We did not yet know each other’s stories. We had to listen and learn about each other, and grow and change together as a community.

In Eugene Peterson’s The Message, John 1:14 is paraphrased as, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” During the Advent and Christmas season, we remember the world changing event of the incarnation. The idea that the incarnation of Jesus could be understood as God “moving into the neighborhood” has shaped many Christmas sermons, conversations, and even our practices of co-creating new faith communities.

Some of the same practices which occur when new people move into a new neighborhood also occur when a new faith community is co-created in a new place. It takes time to listen and to learn from the neighbors who are already there. It takes time to learn each other’s stories and to build trusting relationships and authentic community. Over time, the community is able to celebrate, grieve, grow, and change together.

For our churches, one of the first questions we must ask is, “who is our neighbor?” We follow up with questions like, “what kind of neighbor will we be in this community?” Over time, and with God’s grace, as the body of Christ takes shape in a community, we experience the privilege of suffering and celebrating together. Our churches are shaped by the community, and the community is shaped by the body of Christ.

And just like the whole world changed when the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood, our prayer is our congregations and communities might also experience the transforming power of the gospel because the presence of Christ is welcomed among us.

Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support for our new faith communities who seek to be good neighbors, as we co-create new places for new people to gather at the expansive communion table of Jesus Christ.
At Hope Recovery we say, “We are all recovering from something.” As a recovering person who is now also a recovery pastor, my deepest desire is to experience God’s healing, a return to wholeness and a deep sense of my holiness in light of God’s love. This is the message that we at Hope Recovery seek to share and carry to anyone who longs for more, while at the same time, holding hope for anyone who still feels hopeless.

Bound together by the common thread of suffering in our addictions and seeking God’s power to solve our problems, we first recognized that recovering people are from all different religious backgrounds. So as not to compete with the Sunday church of anyone’s choosing, Hope Recovery meets on a Thursday evening. We practice a conversational style worship service that also contains elements of a 12th step meeting. We celebrate weekly communion with the intention of inviting God into our lives in a way which is full of mystery - believing that Jesus Christ still has the power to heal us and the world.

In 2021, we were offered the opportunity to rehome into a quaint, brick church (formerly Devon Park UMC), which became a place to welcome and receive recovering people - a church and community space they could really claim as their own where everyone felt invited, comfortable and uninhibited. We’ve heard many people who enter our church exclaim, “I love it here!”

We sought to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere where Jesus can invite himself into the lives and hearts of everyone who encounters our space throughout the week. We made intentional choices that communicated the message that if you say you belong, then you belong. We created a central coffee room where people can linger and converse. We changed the seating in the sanctuary from pews/carpet to stackable chairs/hardwood floors in order to have a more flexible space to accommodate different groups and events. We obtained modern Christian art to reflect diversity and share God’s imagination about who God can be for each of us.

Members of 12 Step groups that meet at the church (but don’t attend our worship service) have helped with projects such as the 18-bed community garden, building repairs and community events. When The Warming Shelter, an emergency overnight pop-up shelter that hosts people experiencing homelessness on Wilmington’s coldest nights, needed volunteers last January, members of Narcotics Anonymous (NA) generously gave their time to serve those in need.

In one year’s time, Hope Recovery church has grown to hosting 20+ weekly activities, seven days a week including: worship by two congregations, 12 Step Meetings, Yoga, Meditation, Small Groups, and monthly events like Songwriter Sessions where local musicians share the stories behind their music. We see all the people of these groups as Hope Recovery’s people.

We continue to learn how to practice the presence of hospitality and availability by acting as a host of this beautiful and lively space. My brightly decorated office, with three comfy chairs positioned right by the door, is located just across the hall from our large meeting room and invites someone to come in and “sit a spell.” It is during these conversations where opportunities to encourage, comfort and pray are born. At Hope Recovery we are trying to cultivate the invitation for Jesus to come and heal, liberate and free people from the bondage of addiction so they can discover genuine love and belonging and experience transformation.

In Luke 19, Jesus says, “I want to stay with you today.” My prayer is that Hope Recovery will continue to resound with a joyful and welcoming, “Yes, Lord!”