

A crossroads place

Minister Lisa Gorman, executive director of Lighthouse Ministries in Benton Harbor, was born and raised in Benton Harbor. She moved to Atlanta after graduating from Benton Harbor High School in 1983 and from Lake Michigan College in 1985 with an associate degree in journalism.

In Atlanta, she said she accepted the call to the ministry and earned a master of divinity degree in counseling and Christian education from Interdenominational Theological Center.

After working as a minister in several locations in Georgia, she returned in 2009 to Benton Harbor, working as a substitute teacher and paraprofessional with Benton Harbor Area Schools before becoming executive director of Lighthouse Ministries in January 2011.

She said a staff of two, along with many volunteers, runs 11 programs at Lighthouse Ministries. Volunteers include students from Western Michigan University and Andrews University who are studying to become social workers and counselors.

She has been married and divorced and now is engaged to Thomas Holden, who moved to Benton Harbor to be near her. Gorman talked recently with Staff Writer Louise Wrege.

What brought you back to Benton Harbor in 2009 after living in Georgia for almost 25 years?

As my grandmother aged, the mantle was passed to my mother to take care of her. But when my mother's health challenges came, she said, "I can't do this by myself." So coming home with a 3-year-old, I'm letting my daughter see what her responsibility will be if something happens to me. Be-

cause that's what we do. We don't put our family members in nursing homes.

It is wonderful because my daughter, who is almost 7, gets to hear the stories about me growing up in this community and she gets to eat that wonderful food that nurtured and nourished me from my mother and grandmother.

What does Lighthouse Ministries do?

My first duty as executive director was I appealed to the board to let me change the name from Harbor Harvest Urban Ministries because I was getting these phone calls from people thinking we were a food bank.

We offer an array of services. We do children and youth well. Even though we touch on the family as a whole, our main focus is children and youth.

How many children do you serve?

We served 62 for the summer and we usually serve 18 to 20 for our Peace Partner Tutorial Program (for kindergarten through third grade) and about 50 for our Lighthouse Academic Assistance Program (for fourth through eighth grades).

The good thing about our location, being in the heart of the city, for our kids for summer and even our after-school program and our scouting program, a lot of the kids are able to walk here.

What other programs do you offer?

We provide community health checks once a month. We do cholesterol and blood pressure screenings, along with HIV and AIDS testing. This service is free to the community. ... We also offer Lighthouse Mission opportunities. Every year, we take in about eight to 10 groups that want to come here from another lo-



Don Campbell / HP staff

Minister Lisa Gorman, executive director of Lighthouse Ministries of Benton Harbor, is photographed at the center. She said the downtown ministry's prime focus is children, but it serves families and adults.

cation, and they actually come here and live in our building for a weekend urban excursion. By then I'll have contacted the city, asking them if they have any senior citizens who need their house painted or their fence painted. Small home repairs. We've unearthed a basketball gym in our basement. They've torn down the walls. They've painted a beautiful tiger. They're getting ready to restore this so, during the winter months, the kids can have a place to play.

What do you mean by unearthing?

When this building was originally built in the early 1900s, there was a basketball court and a one-lane bowling alley. As the congregation aged and moved away and their children grew up, they decided to

put up partitions and walls to house all of the stuff for the wonderful rummage sales they would give.

Our goal is to get it up by this year and we're probably about 80 percent through. When it gets hot, we can go down to the belly of the church and participate in the coolness of that wonderful gym.

You're a minister. Do you have church services?

We're just beginning a new worship experience for those who are addicted and those who are returning to the community from incarceration. This Bible study experience is going to be an offspring from our Narcotics Anonymous meetings that we have here.

I started the worship experience a few Sundays ago. To me, it's not just about drugs and alcohol, because

addiction comes in so many ways, and a lot of time people trade off a drug addiction for something else. So, we want to welcome those who are addicted to gambling, to pornography, to whatever your addiction is. It's hard for a person to get a job if their mind is in bondage. This is a resource place for jobs as well.

How have you helped connect people with jobs?

When the Senior PGA came, they asked if they could help us in any way. I shared that the people I serve are felons or recovering addicts. And I said if you can't help them, then you can't help Lighthouse because these are the people we are trying to help re-enter the community. They said, "If you can find us 25 people who can pass an interview and can pass a

drug test, we can do that." We did a dress-for-success. We did mock interviews, and they went down there and for that week. They were parking attendants.

A lot of them worked 10 to 12 hours a day for that entire week parking cars. And that money allowed them to help their children and to pay their bills, and they were very grateful for the opportunity.

Where is your future?

My future is to take off the hat of executive director because I want to find a successor. I am an elder in the United Methodist Church. I want to fully get the Lighthouse Church up and running and find a successor for executive director. It's time. I want to do more in transforming lives.