



LYDIA'S HOUSE // WINTER 2025 / 2026



(Mother and Child, 1959 by Elizabeth Catlett)

For the hungry and the overfed

May we have enough.

For the mourners and the mockers

May we laugh together.

For the victims and the oppressors

May we share power wisely.

For the peacemakers and the warmongers

**May clear truth and stern love
lead us to harmony.**

For the silenced and the propagandists

**May we speak our own words
in truth.**

For the unemployed and the overworked

**May our impress on the earth
be kindly and creative.**

For the troubled and the sleek

**May we live together
as wounded healers.**

For the homeless and the cosseted

**May our homes be simple,
warm and welcoming.**

For the vibrant and the dying

May we all die to live.

- A prayer that the staff prays together weekly,
from the New Zealand Anglican Prayer Book



LYDIA'S HOUSE  offering hospitality in the Catholic Worker Tradition



HOUSE NOTES

by Meridith Owensby

One of my favorite conversational gambits with new community members is to show them the crowd gathered in our new (very large) dining room and to tell them the playroom used to be our dining room. Can you picture how crowded it was? How loud with the running, squealing kids packed into that small space? How did we manage it?

Even with the expansion, we still manage to overfill spaces. The extra space has been an excuse to invite EVEN MORE people over. A recent Wednesday night saw 13 families gathered, each with one or more children, plus volunteers numbering in the double digits. A bounteous house indeed. We also used our new space for so much this summer and fall, including summer camp.



While our services and guest numbers were at an all-time high, staff capacity reached a new low in July when Mary Ellen was diagnosed with breast cancer. This was on none of our bingo cards for the year. Mary Ellen has risen to the challenge with her signature aplomb, blogging about the experience on Substack (slowprocessing) and remaining curious and open even as thankless surgeries and appointments fill her calendar. As of this writing her prognosis is good, although radiation looms large this month.



July also found us at our annual pilgrimage to Stricker's Grove, this time courtesy of the Farm Bureau. We really enjoyed the 4H displays and farm animals, the cloggers and Chapel Roan covers that accompanied our visit for the rides and free ice



cream. We also enjoyed the Norwood Day parade, with a location less terrifying for small children snagging candy. The free sunglasses from a local nonprofit were a big hit, and we continue to find fluorescent shades in odd corners of the house and yard even all these months after.

Family-centric opportunities abounded in July, as we hosted our own Family camp for the first time and concluded summer festivities with some family fun nights. We had a large turnout for Laundry Love, where we provided dinner, childcare, and quarters for the laundromat and families provided the dirty clothes. We also went skating at The Place, finding the rink a gleefully equalizing scene for falling down in dramatic ways for adults and kids alike.

As camp came to a close and we said goodbye to camp

staff, we also said goodbye to our MVC volunteer Laurel. Laurel left as both a certified tax volunteer and a trained doula, with her first attended birth coming in just under the wire. **Laurel and her husband Andrew**, also a weekly Lydia's House volunteer, moved to Saint Louis to pursue additional education and professional opportunities. Saint Louis is a lucky city.



We also said goodbye to **Hanna**, our first ever German gap year volunteer. Hanna managed to both keep the house beautifully clean and increase its beauty with her wall and door murals and artwork. It is a gift we get to see daily, and we will continue to be grateful for the year she spent with us.

Staff turnover left us with some holes, as it always does, and we were grateful to **Dane Miller** for filling in as our



temporary maintenance guy, helping us fill the units in our landlord partnership building, 1744 Cleveland Ave, and navigate many Section 8 inspections and unit turnovers. Also, our regulars continued to show up in full force, especially in August. Both **Carol and Joan** did more hours at the house, and **Anne** answered our cry for help post cancer diagnosis by taking a couple of weeks away from her thriving Kansan



dermatology practice to cook and clean on Mills Ave. Anne's presence allowed Mary Ellen and I to travel to Bloomington to say goodbye to the **Martinie-Eilers**, our Bloomington Catholic Worker friends, as they headed to the Bruderhof for a year of discernment; the Mitchell-Eilermans also made a trip to the Spring Valley Bruderhof about that time to see our friends **Toby, Johanna, Joyce, Tiffany, Fran and Tim** and bask in their amazing riverside sauna. Thanks so much for this quick vacation!

We ended that slim season, thankfully, by welcoming Lydia's House fellowship participant **Gabi** to the crew in August. Gabi has been handling volunteer coordination with verve, and she has recruited her mom into the mix as both a pharmacist (coordinating our first ever flu shot clinic) and a meal volunteer. Gabi was joined by Mercy Volunteer **Erin**, whose diverse skills in both maintenance and childcare have been a boon to the community. Soon following were our Xavier student regulars, back from summer vacation, and German gap year students **Amelie and Theresa**.

Our big development in September was the opening of Christ Light Day Nursery, our foray into childcare for current and former Lydia's House kids. **Amanda Nobbe** has thoughtfully, patiently shepherded this ministry into being, for which we are





As leaves and snow flurries fall and we look toward the holidays, we are grateful for the Lydia's House community, both in house and those who receive this newsletter. As Mary Ellen's cancer and the government shutdown have proven, we can't know what challenges lie ahead. We can continue to build robust, resilient relationships with one another, however, relationships that will hold us through the curveballs of life. Thank you for continuing to hold Lydia's House this season.



forever grateful and she is joined by former guest **Jada**, who was just hired as assistant director. Daycare highlights have included a weekly fieldtrip to the shelter for lunch, a farm visit from Nobbe farms, and lots of time spent on the indoor jungle gym. Many thanks to many donors to this effort especially, most recently, the BGR Foundation and The HCS Foundation.

At the end of September we restarted our Wednesday night family religious education program in a big way. We celebrated the rite of baptism with **Princess** and her family and Jada and her family with unmitigated joy. That same night we welcomed a newlywed couple from the Bruderhof, **Ike**



and Janelle Potts, who spent their six-week honeymoon in beautiful Norwood, Ohio, chasing kids, building sandboxes, and finding time to accompany Mary Ellen's kids to King's Island a time or two.

October was bookended by three joyous gatherings. We used the occasion of my 45th birthday to welcome an ice cream truck to Lydia's House, enabling 50 of my closest Lydia's House friends and well-wishers to celebrate with me. That same driveway setting saw a Halloween fire pit and smore roasting opportunity, ensuring every Bluey and superhero costume was covered with gooey sugar by the end of the night. Finally, we took a group of families to Gorman Farm, courtesy of **Kathy Aerni**.

BOOK REVIEW: APPROACHING HOLY GROUND: THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME UGANDA MISSION

By Sister Mary Margaret Droege, SND

By Mary Ellen Mitchell

I received a copy of this book from my mother-in-law, who wanted all of her children to know of the important work their aunt, Sister Janet Stamm, did in Uganda. I know Sister Janet, and have been grateful for her prayers and inquiries over the years, but didn't know much about her ministry. I started reading this simple publication with the intention of perusal and to look at the photos, but was quickly captivated. What struck me, early on in the 260 page history lesson, was the careful intention that shaped the sister's decision to go to Uganda. Years of discernment and visits led the group of middle-aged nuns to embark on a journey to a rural part of a country that mandated malaria vaccines and necessitated education on farming and water storage in order to survive. Invitations from Ugandan priests were met with visits into "the bush" in all terrain vehicles. Sister Janet, no more than 120 pounds and soft spoken, left the beautiful convent on the hill in Covington, Ky to pave a path trod by many missionaries before her, one filled with hospitality and peril, held only by donations from home, the enthusiasm of her Ugandan hosts, her 3 vowed religious companions, and prayer.

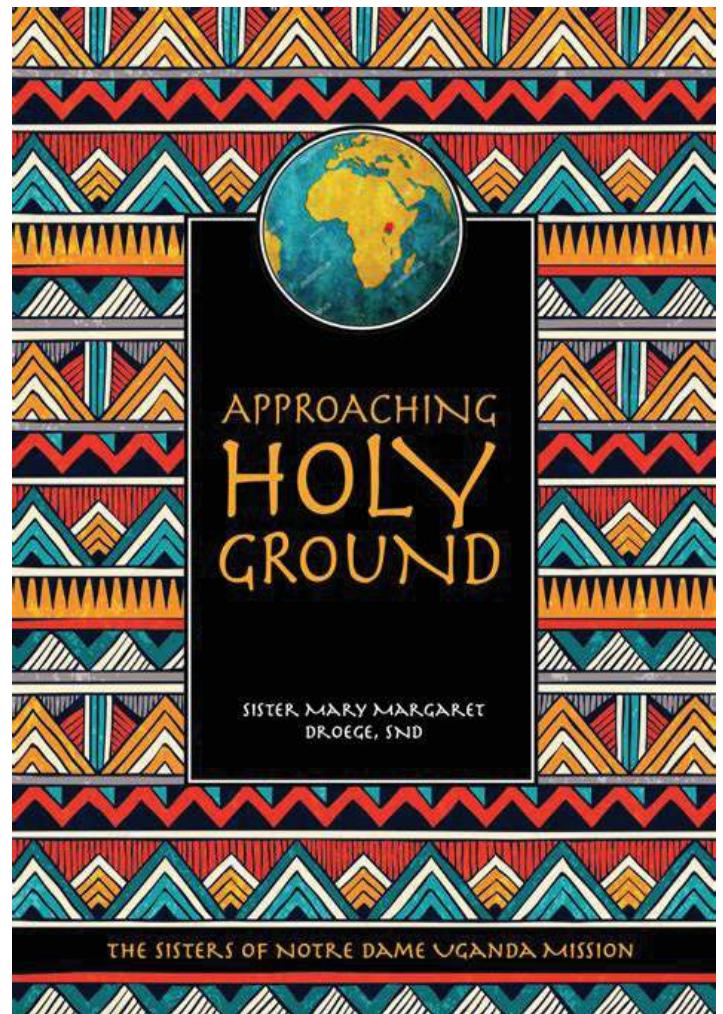
As the sisters continued on, they seemed unrelenting in their pursuit of building a carefully crafted and thoughtful compound, creating a top-notch learning environment for children of the surrounding villages. In a system that they knew little about, they navigated building codes, complex supply chains, fires, floods and food shortages. They operated with spotty internet and the occasional fax; they warned friends back home not to email photos because their technology couldn't handle the upload. They celebrated simple feast days, and rallied to build a church and hire a priest so they could have daily mass.

A memory I have of Sister Janet, when she came to my wedding in 2007, was that she was overwhelmed with the opulence of our extended family. She attended 3 weddings during her visit, and was anxious to return to Uganda. In Uganda she hauled water in plastic "jerry cans" and experimented with raising rabbits for protein. Her order had opened St. Julie primary school in 1998, offering a boarding program for 7–13-year-old children. She was unequivocal in her desire to escape our DJ's, cakes and chicken dances to tend to her boarding elementary students, and as I read the book I understood why. The sisters had the unique experience of being caught up in God's goodness and grace, seeing their mustard seed worth of effort and talent multiplied again and again. Who wants catered BBQ in Northern Kentucky when you can be part of a miracle in a country that boasts among the highest rates of Catholic conversion in the world?

The book concludes with, perhaps, the biggest surprise. While the sisters went to serve the villagers by providing internationally recognized educational standards, they left Uganda having founded a new chapter for their order. Indeed, the convent in Covington is being torn down this season, as the sisters here locally have all been relocated to a nursing home. The future of the sisters of Notre Dame is in Uganda, a treasure in a field that now houses a convent, several school buildings, a church, a garden, a chapel, and a growing group of young nuns, eager to be doers of the Word.

The book is actually available on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Approaching-Holy-Ground-Sisters-Mission/dp/1732749396>

I highly recommend it.



MY FIRST 30 DAYS

By Theresa Triebsees

Doing a gap year after high school was something I had dreamed about for a very long time. That's probably why it felt so unreal sitting on a plane from Germany to Cincinnati, OH, to volunteer at Lydia's House for one year. Now, one month later, I still can't decide what my favorite memory has been.

I love the little moments at the shelter: sitting together for dinner, helping to cook and set up the table so it feels like a festive event every evening. The satisfaction after finishing a house duty shift, when the shelter looks clean again—knowing it will be undone the following day.

I loved meeting all the new colleagues and the ongoing process of getting to know them: the "core" staff I'll be working with all year, who come from different parts of the U.S.; the Xavier students working at the daycare and helping with dinner and house duty; and the meal volunteers who bring or prepare great food every evening.

I love seeing the little steps the children at the daycare make in their daily learning and growth. Watching them walk from the playground to the shelter on their own feet—which might not look like much, but as a teacher you know how far they've come. The five minutes of silence at the lunch table, when only a few weeks ago

it was so loud. Seeing children fall asleep at nap time who once refused to lie down for more than two minutes. Hearing the little "pewse" with a big smile from a child asking for a toy, when before they just grabbed everything they wanted.

Some of my favorite memories were made outside of work. For example, the feeling of standing on the John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge for the first time. I was so proud to be there on my own, after using Cincinnati's public transportation for the first time.

I loved joining a book club and meeting regularly to read and have nice conversations—just knowing the only thing we share is our love for the book we're currently reading.

I enjoyed visiting a worship night combined with my first time at Chick-fil-A: singing to God and praising, followed by trying another iconic American fast food. I'm also very grateful for the opportunity to see an FC Cincinnati soccer game. While I'm not a big soccer fan, it was funny to see how invested people were, and the atmosphere was amazing.

I love sitting on the front porch, talking with new friends—or just watching people in silence, like German grandmas do in the morning.

I love meeting friends at the local café and running into unexpected acquaintances. It creates a sense of comfort and home in a city so far away and so different from my actual home.

I love cooking German food for my own comfort and for non-Germans to try, sharing my culture with them. That's also why I loved visiting Cincinnati's Oktoberfest and seeing so many people enjoying parts of my culture on the other side of the world.

What I probably enjoy most about working at Lydia's House are the contrasts—between the silent hours in the shelter and the lively hours at the daycare and dinner, the variety in each day. The contrast of the clear structure of each week and the unknown of which surprises each day will hold.

I'm so grateful for the opportunity to experience life in a different country and in such a special community. I'm also very thankful for everyone I've met here, who welcomed me with open arms and showed me their culture. I've already made so many wonderful memories that I can't choose a favorite—and I know there are more to come.



FOLLOWING JESUS EXAMPLE OF LOVING THE POOR

By Gabi Kim, Community Ministry Fellow

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God"
(Luke 6:20)*

Over the course of the fall, protests have been mounting against our federal government's leadership. Bernie Sanders, reflecting on the No Kings Protest, the Big Beautiful Bill, and the October and November government shutdown said, "15 million low-income and working-class Americans are going to lose their health insurance. Studies indicate that when you take away health insurance with so many people, you know what happens? 50,000 people will die unnecessarily every single year, 50,000 of our fellow Americans." Bernie's statement tracks with the 2025 Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies report. Lack of access to nutritional food, far distances to pharmacies, rising insurance and housing costs, and more contribute to the multilayered challenges imposed on those experiencing poverty in our state and country.

In the midst of these socio political and economic challenges, I am encouraged by Jesus' example. Following the footsteps of his predecessor in his first encyclical, *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo XIV reaffirmed the Church's role of helping the poor. He described the story of the woman who poured expensive oil on the head of Jesus. While the disciples criticized her because the perfume could have been sold to help more people, Pope Leo claimed, "that woman saw in Jesus the lowly and suffering Messiah on whom she could pour out her love. What comfort that anointing must have brought to the very head that within a few days would be pierced by thorns!" The woman's extravagant gift to Jesus represents how we should serve others. She could not save Jesus from suffering on the cross, but she could provide him support. This story reminds me of our Atrium fall celebration on October 22, 2025 when we supervised children roasting hot dogs and s'mores over a campfire. We could have spent the s'mores supply money to help with someone's rent payment, as treats are not a necessity. But, providing children with memories is a great gift in the midst of our economic uncertainty. What joy it is to watch the small ones enjoy sugar and community.

At the same time, we must do more than provide nice things. Jesus showed us that helping the poor involves providing comfort and standing up for injustice. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 26:40). For example, with the over-a-month-long



government shutdown, families in need have not received SNAP food benefits to feed their families in November. This requires more than s'mores, but collective action!

Now more than ever, it is our duty as Christians to exemplify the love of Christ for the poor. For me, this means helping our current guests navigate Section 8 and filling out housing applications together. I also coordinate our weekly dinners so we can make community with staff, guests, and friends of the shelter, while also feeding them nutritious, whole meals. I pulled in my mom (a pharmacist) to run a vaccine clinic, my fiancé to donate to our food assistance fund, and a friend who (I hope) will be our next year long, live-in fellow. When needed, I'm at the daycare or cleaning toilets.

My path to doing this work is one among many. Though we can't all offer a year of service, my prayer is that each reader will find unique ways to extend kindness, love, and generosity to the people in need and continue to fight for a better world through community action. We must each find ways to use our gifts to love our neighbors. This call is uniquely fitted to the Christian's vocation.



CHILDREN SHOULD LIVE IN BUILDINGS

A copy of this article was published in the October 26, 2025 print edition of the Cincinnati Enquirer

By Mary Ellen Mitchell, Lydia's House co founder and co director

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported on October 21 that Cincinnati Public Schools will open a parking lot for school families to live in, while their primary residence is a car. The lot will include a private bathroom, flash lights and support services, and will be "safe" on Taft. The decision comes after years of attempting to put families in motels, only to see them return to homelessness. The lot, which opens in March 2026, will allow 12 families at a time to be car dwellers and parents of school age children at the same time. It, presumably, offers them an exemption from scrutiny from child protection services, which typically removes children living in places not fit for human habitation. CPS reports that the 12 spots should be "plenty" to address the car living needs that surface from the 4,326 homeless children it has enrolled.

I was, honestly, glad to hear about this development, while it also made me nauseous. My gladness comes because I, at times, run the intake line for the shelter that I co-founded, Lydia's House. Our target demographic is women with children under age 5, so I don't think our shelter services will compete with the car camping option, though many calling our intake are also living in cars. I've written about these cases before, and fought for housing for car dwellers. I've spoken with mothers about the intimate details of living in cars, which can include moving daily, to avoid suspicion from the library or Walmart workers that frequent these same lots. Families struggle with bathrooms, of course, and entertainment. It's hard to keep a 3-year-old in 60 square feet of space, sleeping upright. I can't credibly say I know how many of these women and children there are, but I've been haunted by every such conversation I've had over 11 years. So, the fact that a select group of 12 at a time won't have to move daily and will have a bathroom made me feel a bit relieved. I emailed my co-worker and told her to add it to the sad list of options we have for families that we say no to at our shelter.

The nausea of this, of course, stems from the reality that we've publicly accepted family homelessness in our region. It's an honest acceptance of a long-standing phenomenon, but 12 spaces for car sleeping is the tip of an iceberg that, apparently, we're ready to reveal. While street homelessness has long been part of our region, and annually we face tragedies like homeless folk freezing or getting run over, the line we've yet to cross is public, unashamed family homelessness. We don't have children on our streets begging, at least we haven't to date, but it seems we will starting in March. It's hard to imagine well-wishers not showing up at this lot with gift cards and food bags, and so it begins, slums with children, not in Mexico City or even Los Angeles, but in Cincinnati, Ohio.

This seems like an indicator of the national moment, one in which we're also imprisoning children at the border, arresting citizens without due cause, and contemplating letting undocumented people die in emergency rooms for lack of funding or rights. We're crossing lines many of us thought we'd never see crossed in this country, and children living on the street is part of this disturbing trend. The decision to give up on housing in favor of cars will no doubt give way to tents, as it should, because cars are expensive. And all of it will create a state of total confusion about minimum standards for children living in our region. How are the authorities to turn a blind eye to the car lot? The mental schism of all this is dizzying, and while we are stunned we are going lower and lower on a scale of human dignity, such that it will be difficult if not impossible to reverse this trend.

The solutions to family homelessness, if not more car lots, are admittedly expensive and complex. Our organization owns or manages 16 units of affordable housing that we rent on Section 8. From attempting to house people and actually housing people I can say with confidence:



- Section 8 has been processed on a 1-year lag, it's bureaucratically dense and riddled with inspection and failures, which causes landlords to make blanket rules against taking it. We have because we believe in the mission of housing very poor children, but I never fault a private landlord for backing out of this program.
- Building new affordable housing is expensive, faces NIMBY reactions, and still often has rents that are over \$1000 for a 2-bedroom apartment
- Being doubled up is often tenuous, and zoning restrictions will make it illegal in many circumstances, so well-meaning relatives can't take in family, even if they want to. The choice to do so limits the housing insecure person's options when they call the homeless hot line 381-SAFE as "doubled up" is not considered high priority. Those in that category often won't be offered any services.

To respond to family homelessness takes an army of compassion, creativity and focus from the people of Greater Cincinnati: churches, private citizens, schools, and government working together to put and keep people under roof. It takes changing zoning laws, building rapidly, renovating existing stock, amending density requirements, and increasing wages and job options so rents are manageable. It takes (likely non profit) landlords and managers who are willing to take on

the hard to house, holding them accountable as tenants while also keeping up buildings and making rents affordable. It also requires new developers to build in affordability, either through allocated units or inclusionary zoning. It means we have to say car camping, or worse, is an unacceptable solution, and then we have to vote with our time, energy and wallets to say yes to levies, new developments in our neighborhood, small projects like well-meaning landlords owning 4 units and large projects like CDCs owning 100 units. We have to accept the reality that we are our sister's keeper. I've done this work, so I know it's hard, but it can be done and needs to be scaled up in every neighborhood of Hamilton county.

We do not have to have family homelessness, but the solution is about more than money (though money helps). Let's not go out to California to learn best practices in family homelessness car lots; let's use that state's proliferation of campers and tents as an example of what we don't want to be and work like it matters to create something better, because moms and kids deserve that, and because we want to live in a region that puts children under roof. In the meantime, I extend my condolences and congratulations to Cincinnati Public Schools on the opening of their homeless car lot. Thanks for trying to do something; I'm sorry we collectively led you to this place.

A BELATED WELCOME TO RACHEL

By Meridith Owensby

Last summer, while I was at a function with United Way, a colleague pulled me aside.

"I was on your website and saw Rachel Burgess is working at Lydia's House," she said. "How did you manage that?"

Her tone was one of both respect and envy, which seemed appropriate to me. One year in, we continue to give thanks every day for having Rachel in our midst.

Rachel came to work at Lydia's House last year through a series of events that felt ordained by God Herself. During a period of discernment, it became clear that our habit of putting one or two year volunteers on administrative duties was less than ideal. As soon as they became proficient, they were on their way out, and we inevitably lost ground in the handovers. In our discouragement, Mary Ellen expressed the wish that a highly competent friend of ours could come work for us.

The next week, that very friend sent a mass email touting the abilities of Rachel, who was returning to the workforce after the birth of her second child and seeking part time employment. Mary Ellen scrambled to put together a meaningful job description and we emailed Rachel that very day.

With a history of working with refugees through Catholic Charities, Rachel was familiar with the frustrations and

viscissitudes of families in crisis. She brings an unflappable demeanor to our ever-changing scene, handling bookkeeping, bill payment, payroll, assistance requests, intake, database management, grant reporting, and countless other tasks with grace. A familiar dialog goes something like this:

Mary Ellen and/or I: Oh no. We forgot to do some ongoing, thankless administrative task.

Rachel: Do you want me to do it from now on?

Mary Ellen and/or I: Do you think you have the time?

Rachel: Yes.

Rachel accomplishes more administration in her 20ish hours a week than either Mary Ellen or I did combined. We know we are serving our guests and former guests with more reliability and promptness because Rachel is on the job. This month alone, Rachel is reworking our chart of accounts (with help from our long-suffering accountant Julia), drafting next year's budget, and submitting RTAs for the four families we house who recently received Section 8 vouchers. These are tasks that would be stressful and long delayed without her help.

Thank you, Rachel, for making this your work and performing it with integrity and grace. We are glad you are here.



SUMMER CAMP

In June and July we hosted summer day camp for guest and former guest kids. We spent a ton of time outside, swimming, riding bikes and finding new ways to misuse playground equipment (Why climb on the outside of a tube slide, really?) We also consumed pounds of slushies, brought to us by a Ninja Slush machine (sponsored by our beloved Anne Housholder.)

Summer camp was held by many hands, as always. We welcomed three Notre Dame Bridge interns: Jerry, Evyonna, and Maeve, who lived on site and worked their tails off to keep the kids fed, entertained and safe. They were joined by Annie and Sam Eilerman and a rotating crew of teenagers, Trout Lilly Montessori staff and Joyce Mow from the Bruderhof, who put both her artistic and musical skills to good use. The crew was rounded out by Matthew Owensby, who journeyed up from Georgia in his cool "Schoolie" (converted school bus) and brought new games and a great deal of joy to the endeavor.

Special thanks to the SC Ministry fund, The Dater Foundation, GCF Summertime kids and The Harrison Foundation, for sponsoring our summer offerings. **Thanks to St. Timothy Episcopal Church for sponsoring our Family Camp!**

The following is a reflection from Sam, a summer worker:

I have volunteered and worked at Lydia's House countless times, offering my last 2 summers working at the summer camp there which helps kids experience the true joys of summer and sunshine, compared to the lonely, indoor times they might have experienced before. I made sure that through this time I made connections with the kids and became a mentor. Doing this job had its challenges, but those challenges made me grow in patience, and gentleness.

Through the summer camps, I have made genuine connections with kids who've experienced homelessness. There is one kid in particular, named Tamir, that I have grown a deep love for. He is sort of known as the hard kid, and the one with a big attitude. I never intended to work the whole day at summer camp, but instead just started helping cook the lunches so I could get my school required service hours. But I remember hearing his 4 year-old voice and his ridiculous humor on one of the days and I started volunteering more and more, particularly

with him. Other counselors started noticing, and my mom (the director of the camp) would put me "in charge" of Tamir, including being the swim teacher for him during the swimming lessons we gave, or sent him to me when he would complain about the activities they were doing or when he wandered off instead of doing what was instructed.

During this time, I would play with him on the playground, cook with him, or just follow him around wherever he went. I soon would wake up in the mornings excited to see Tamir, and he quickly became my favorite camper. I would smile whenever he ran through the door yelling "SAM!" and give me a very aggressive hug. Soon enough I would be working every day and taking care of Tamir for numerous hours until summer camp came to an end. I found the importance of not just volunteering to help someone, but to also give someone a person to be excited for and to make a friendship with.





FAMILY CAMP

For many years now, Lydia's House has engaged in the annual ritual of family camp. The model was introduced to us by the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio. Together, kids and adults journey to some out-of-the-way spot to swim, share meals, worship and marvel at nature.

This year we decided to venture beyond pre-packaged family camp offerings and embark on a new self-hosted model. Little did we know the amount of effort this required would be akin to putting on a destination wedding specifically centered on the numerous child guests. There was lodging, food, transportation, and weather to consider. We also required a golf cart rental, as one regular child attendee with special needs spends most of his waking hours riding or getting on and off the cart every year.

Friends, this year rocked. We had a great time.

What highlights can I offer to convey what a fabulous time we had? The underage paddle boat captains? The kindergartener fighting the swarm of lightning bugs (What ARE THEY?!?)? The frog finders spending hours in the tall grass at the edge of the lake? The terror and joy of mass s'more production (Thanks for risking your life, Ben!)? The choreographed Jackson 5 dances at the Talent Show?

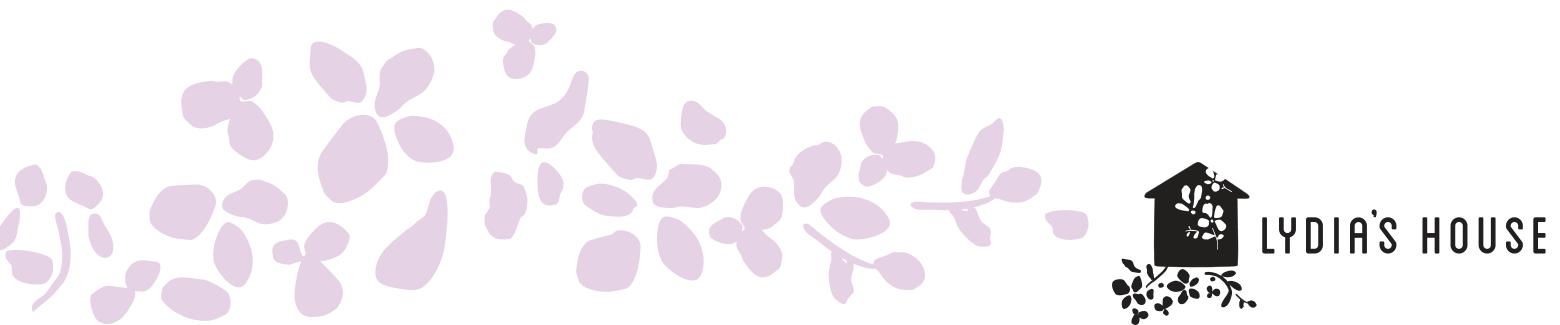
We left the weekend sun dazzled, bug bitten and exhausted, and firmly resolved to do it all again in 2026. You should come. Mark your calendars for July 17-19, 2026, the family camp opportunity we are officially christening our Lydia's House Annual Family Reunion.

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NEW MISSION AND VISION

It's been 13 years since we first wrote a mission and vision statement. As part of our strategic planning process we decided to update these, noting a lot has changed. Here's what we came up with after a collaborative process with the board and staff:

The mission of Lydia's House is to provide safe housing, holistic care, and supportive community, walking with families from crisis to stability.

Our vision is to be a sanctuary where God's beloved community takes root and grows, offering guests, workers, and supporters a path toward abundant life together.

