

**NorthStar Offers Free Community Tax Services**

NorthStar Christian Center is partnering with The Cooperative Ministry to provide free income tax services to Midlands individuals and families. VITAP – or Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program – is an IRS-sponsored program to help low to moderate income families offset the cost of “accurate tax preparations completed with integrity.” According to NorthStar Associate Pastor John Lakin, the service is just one of the ways his church is helping to increase economic self-sufficiency to those experiencing poverty.

“We see this type of assistance as a gospel imperative. Jesus didn’t deal with just spiritual matters, He was about the body and soul,” Lakin says adding that collaborations like this present ways for churches to partner with organizations of similar values to accomplish more to address ongoing needs of the impoverished.

As discussed in a recent [Our One Priority podcast](https://columbiametro.org/podcast-062/) on this topic, there are many income tax filing services that may appear not-for-profit but are predatory in nature. When a family goes to NorthStar for this service they can be assured that the work will be done by trained and certified individuals and through a Covid-safe drop off system. VITAP tax preparers must pass an exam and be certified by the IRS before assisting in the ministry and a separate certified individual reviews the filing before it is submitted to ensure accuracy.

“We do this because we love our community. Every year someone asks, ‘so this is a church? And you’re doing taxes free of charge? Why?’ We tell people that we care about the economic success of those in the community and this is one way we can do that,” Lakin explains. “When you can assure someone that no, there is nothing expected from this, we do it just because we think Jesus cares about these kinds of things and that we love them, it gives another way to give a creative witness.”

The ministry is currently assisting clients for this year’s tax filing which they expect to be a full season as Lakin reports it prepared “more taxes last year than any prior to it.”

Clients can find a list of tax filing sites nearest to them on The Cooperative Ministry’s website at [www.CoopMin.org](http://www.CoopMin.org). The IRS also publicizes drop off days, times and other related information online [here](https://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep/jsp/direction.jsp?id=27030&lng=-80.992219&lat=34.014485).

Individuals interested in becoming trained to assist in future tax seasons should visit The Cooperative Ministry website at [www.CoopMin.org](http://www.CoopMin.org)