

**VLC Spotlight: Yvonne Murray, NorthStar Christian Center/Center of Hope**

Yvonne Murray is a member of NorthStar Christian Center and serves as the director of the NorthStar Center of Hope, a community ministry located in the former Eastside Baptist Church building just off Forest Drive behind Richland Mall. Yvonne is in her first term serving on the Visionary Leadership Community (VLC), which meets almost monthly to conduct CMBA business and share ministry updates from our Family of Church across the Midlands. NorthStar Center of Hope is the host site for the September VLC meeting.

Yvonne is a Columbia native and attended Richland School District One schools. She went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in social work from Columbia College and a master’s degree in community counseling from Webster University. She worked as a school social worker for Richland School District One for 27 years before retiring in 2020, when she began her work with NorthStar Center of Hope.

“NorthStar is a church full of love and a place to feel accepted. I can’t say that enough,” Yvonne says of the church she and her family have been members of for more than 30 years. “If you want to be involved in outreach, NorthStar is the place for you.”

CMBA members may recall that in 2018 Eastside Baptist Church members voted to dissolve that church and gave permission for its property and assets to be given to NorthStar Christian Center. NorthStar, itself a revitalized congregation born out of the former Forest Drive Baptist Church, has a heart for the local community through ministries like a growing daycare, afterschool academy, food pantry and a clothing closet. At the time, Pastor Thomas spoke to the church’s desire to “be a blessing” back in the Forest Acres community that the church had once been a part of, by first meeting practical needs.

Under Yvonne’s leadership the NorthStar Center of Hope has reached many individuals. On each Thursday and two Saturdays out of the month, Yvonne says the center helps families “put food on the table. We get to see the face of food insecurity. We see people coming from various zip codes around the city. We hear the hardships they face – the loss, grief and despair. Many of our volunteers are coming to know that missing one paycheck is a one-way ticket to financial hardship for many working people.”

The Center helps families regroup and connects them with resources, information and referrals. “Collaboration with groups and organizations with similar goals is essential to what we do at The Center of Hope to carry out our mission to strengthen and empower our community. We welcome community involvement and partnerships,” Yvonne explains.

One such partnership is with FoodShare South Carolina – established through the UofSC School of Medicine – which fills orders for fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables to members of the community. Yvonne still expresses appreciation for a CMBA grant the Center received that was used to purchase both a refrigerator to keep perishable food donations and some FoodShare South Carolina boxes to distribute through the pantry.

CMBA churches are invited to partner with the Center of Hope through food drives, perishable and nonperishable food donations and volunteer assistance to “better meet the demands and needs of the community.” On October 15, the Center is also hosting “Courageous Conversations: Matters of the Heart,” its first-ever conference in partnership with Sister Care and in observance of Domestic Violence Awareness month. [Registration](https://register.etransfer.com/cgi-bin/acct/LCR5F39BVE/displayForm.pl?dir=X3J7OI9J_2022&again=) is required for the free event which has limited space and is for women only.

Regarding her time on VLC, Yvonne says she has enjoyed learning more about the work and ministries of CMBA. Since starting in January 2021, she has participated virtually in some meetings, but says she “appreciates that even though I’ve felt a little disconnected because of the pandemic, I have been welcomed and felt there is always a place for me to be a part of what is going on.”

Yvonne says CMBA provides connections – to churches and individuals – that feel inclusive and that its members “automatically inherit enormous support. It fosters a sense of safety.” She’s looking forward to becoming more involved at a time when new Executive Director Jamie Rogers is coming on board.

“I think it will be meaningful to learn through Jamie’s eyes and experience since he is a new leader, because I’m also fairly new. I’m looking forward to that,” she says.

Yvonne has adult children and is a grandmother. Because of her love of all kinds of music genres, she labels herself a “juke box” and enjoys singing and doing karaoke when given the chance. Yvonne also enjoys discovering the definitions and origins of words and world languages. She credits her mother reading the World Book Encyclopedia in her home growing up for her interests in languages and cultures, which has helped her “respect differences, appreciate similarities and develop meaningful relationships.”

To find out more information about partnership and volunteer opportunities at NorthStar Center of Hope, visit [www.hope.northstarcolumbia.org](http://www.hope.northstarcolumbia.org).