



## News Release

*For immediate release*

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### “Unity in the Community Day” addresses food desert

*Mercy Associates, Sisters of Mercy, and church and community volunteers to  
plant garden for church food bank*

**CHARLOTTE – September 14, 2017** – What if you had to walk to a bus stop, ride at least a mile to a grocery store to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, and then carry them back home? That journey might be too difficult for you, and you’d turn to nearby convenience stores and fast food restaurants instead. In this scenario, there’s a strong possibility that you and your neighbors live in a “food desert”—a location that’s nearly barren of fresh food.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Reeder Memorial Baptist Church at 3725 Beatties Ford Road in Charlotte is located in one of those food deserts.

Currently, the church operates a canned food bank as one of its largest ministries, but Senior Pastor Thomas Farrow, Jr. says that a fresh vegetable garden would encourage residents to make healthier food choices. “We would not just be giving them food, but giving them something that will make a difference in a long-lasting, meaningful way.”

On Saturday, September 16, from 2-6 p.m., church and community volunteers, Mercy Associates, and Sisters of Mercy will gather for “Unity in the Community Day” to build and prepare organic garden beds and plant carrots, radishes, collard greens, and brussels sprouts on church property.

“We want to pretty much have things in place when spring rolls around,” says Ty Barnes, director of Mercy Association and a member of Reeder Memorial. “This is

an effort to build interfaith community because we are one church and it's important for us to work collaboratively on some things and break down barriers.”

Some 50 Mercy Associates from across the U.S., who are attending a meeting in Belmont this weekend, are volunteering for the gardening service project.

The USDA defines food deserts as locations where whole foods—especially fresh fruits and vegetables—are in short supply and transportation to farmers' markets and supermarkets may be impossible. As a result, residents rely on more convenient food sources that frequently increase the risk of obesity and related diseases. To view a locator of food deserts in the U.S., click here:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/>

“I would hope the garden would be something that would catch on and expand,” says Pastor Farrow. “I would love to meet new people in and around our church. There are a lot of apartments around us and people don't have room to garden.” Among the church's next steps are plans to offer cooking classes on fresh food preparation.

In addition to the garden, other events at Unity in the Community Day will include a blood drive, health screenings, softball and basketball, bouncy houses for children, music, and a cookout.

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### **Mercy Associates**

*Mercy Associates are women and men who discern a call from God to actively engage in a commitment to mercy within a formal relationship with the Sisters of Mercy. Mercy Associates respond to the Gospel invitation of Jesus to minister to those who are economically poor, sick and uneducated. Associates live out their commitments in independent lifestyles, answering the call to mercy within the context of their daily lives. There are more than 3,000 Mercy Associates in the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, including the U.S., Latin America, Jamaica, Guam and the Philippines.*

### **The Sisters of Mercy**

The Sisters of Mercy—an international community of Roman Catholic women—dedicate their lives to God through vows of *poverty*, chastity, obedience and service. For more than 150 years, motivated by the Gospel of Jesus and inspired by the spirit of their founder, Catherine McAuley, the Sisters of Mercy have responded to the changing needs of the times.

*Through prayer and service, the sisters address the causes and effects of violence, racism, degradation of Earth and injustice to women and immigrants. The sisters serve in more than 200 organizations that work with those in need in the U.S., Central and South America, Jamaica, Guam and the Philippines.*

*The Sisters of Mercy – South Central Community, which is headquartered in Belmont, N.C., just outside of Charlotte, comprises 18 states, Guam and Jamaica.*

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