

transformed.

Inside:

Immersed in 28216

Join The Immerse Project

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Your zip code should not determine your access to the gospel.

But all too often, it does.

In Charlotte, NC's 28216, Meeting Place Church occupies a corner of one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. The brick building has offered a faithful presence for decades.

In the congregation, too, faith has been steady. But over time, influence began eroding. The congregation was aging. The neighborhood was changing. And the distance between the church and its community kept growing.

You may not live in 28216, but your church likely faces a similar problem: aging membership, shifting demographics, and distance from the community.



Meeting Place's pastor, Rev. Vince Riley, knew what that distance costs. Before becoming a pastor, he served as a Charlotte police officer. He'd seen firsthand what happened when children lacked spiritual guidance, safe spaces, and reliable adults.

"Too many talented children are locked up right now," he told his congregation more than once. They wanted to help.

The burden was real. But burden alone does not create change. Sometimes, it takes a crisis. Zip code 28216 got one.

On June 8, 2025, a 12-year-old boy was hit by a truck in the neighborhood. The question wouldn't leave Pastor Riley: *What if that child had been inside our Family Life Center instead of in the street?*

For nearly a decade, the church's Family Life Center sat largely unused. The congregation's dream of launching a learning academy had stalled because renovation was a challenge, especially as the city's compliance code requirements outstripped the church's capacity to meet them.

Over time, the building came to feel like tangible evidence of a vision that never materialized. Meeting Place cared deeply about its community, but its leaders realized that caring is not the same as having a clear pathway forward.

To change the neighborhood, they needed more than good intentions. They needed a strategy led by the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Riley and his leadership team enrolled in The Immerse Project. Offered through TMS Global and led by Revs. Leslie James and Sonya Curtis-Tshuma, Immerse is one of the ways TMS Global strengthens local church leaders alongside its international work.

Immerse's goal is simple: help churches build bridges between congregation and community for lasting transformation.

Leslie and Sonya did not hand the church a prepackaged program. Instead, they invited Pastor Riley and his team into a cohort of other churches who wanted to see the gospel advance in their zip codes too.

They learned not to make assumptions but instead to ask powerful questions: *What are the real needs here? Where are the gaps? What assets do we already have? What is God already stirring?*

Through coaching, peer learning, and intentional community engagement, the church began listening. Not just to its own ideas. But also, to its neighborhood. And most importantly, to God.

As the possibilities came into focus, the church grew enthusiastic. The Family Life Center no longer felt like an abandoned dream. Instead, it transformed into a place of possibilities. **Now, Meeting Place Church had more than hope. They had a plan. All they needed was the Holy Spirit to light the pilot.**

When a Christian summer camp approached the church about using the space, Pastor Riley knew the answer. His congregation was ready. That summer, more than 100 children filled the halls with prayer, Scripture, home-cooked meals, laughter, and field trips. Families participated. Relationships formed. Children who had few safe spaces found one.

"This camp is filled with the Holy Spirit," one parent shared. Another said her son hopes to return as a counselor.



"What encourages me most is seeing churches shift from **program-driven activity to partnership-driven mission**—treating their community as their congregation and **measuring impact in changed lives, not just full calendars.**"

Leslie James

Director of The Immerse Project at TMS Global



**"We accommodated
over one hundred kids
in a safe, loving, warm
environment."**

Vatronza Barbour
Meeting Place Church Lay Leader

What had once symbolized deferred dreams became a living expression of the church's mission: inviting everyday people to experience Christ in every way. Now, the church had moved its resources from burden to blueprint and equipped its leaders to understand their neighborhood and activate what God already placed in their hands.

At Meeting Place Church, the impact of Immerse has extended beyond one summer.

The Family Life Center is now positioned as:

- A place of safety.
- A pipeline for young leaders.
- A hub of relational discipleship.
- A bridge between church and community.

Even better, 12 youth and young adults recently said they wanted to follow Jesus and joined the church. Now, Pastor Riley and his team have to discern a discipleship strategy for these young believers. His cohort at Immerse is working with him to develop one.

Meeting Place proves that when churches are equipped with clarity and support, geography does not have to determine gospel access.

Through Immerse, TMS Global is strengthening local leaders so that congregations like Meeting Place Church can *immerse* themselves in their neighborhoods, not as outsiders doing charity, but as partners cultivating lasting transformation.

**Join The
Immerse Project!**

If your church or one you know could benefit from participating in **The Immerse Project**, contact Leslie at lames@tms-global.org or go to The Immerse Project website:



[tms-global.org/churches/
the-immerse-project](https://tms-global.org/churches/the-immerse-project)

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