



## ***From Humble Beginnings...***

### **The History of the Edna Martin Christian Center**

The Edna Martin Christian Center was founded in 1941 as the East Side Christian Center by Mrs. Edna Barnes Martin after a City of Indianapolis survey revealed that 75% of its crime was committed on the east side and the Church Federation of Indianapolis discovered a high rate of juvenile delinquency in the same area.

With a girlhood dream of being a missionary in Africa and lifelong commitment to helping others, Edna Martin was asked to begin a ministry to meet the considerable material and spiritual needs of the eastside community. With no financial backing or physical facilities, she began by

ringing doorbells and talking to children on the streets who seemed to be in the most immediate need for her services.

In a country slowly recovering from the Great Depression, this inner-city area was particularly hard hit. Once a thriving mix of industry and working-class residential neighborhoods, by the '40s the railroad-affiliated businesses had left as four major railway lines were relocated. With the loss of so many employers, substandard housing became the norm, and many homes and businesses stood vacant or burned out. Residents struggled with extremely low-income, little education, and few jobs were available for those seeking to sustain their families. Crime and addiction rates were high, and many children and young adults had little to do other than roam the streets.

In spite of the obstacles she faced, Edna Martin rented a one-room house with no running water for \$14 per month to begin a daycare ministry program. She used the Bible as her textbook, but she also taught honesty, discipline, kindness, thriftiness, and cleanliness. By 1946, the Center became an American Baptist Church home mission. As a result of the affiliation, the Center expanded social services and outreach to the parents and other family members of the children in the daycare ministry. Soon the one-room facility became too small for the growing number of children, and in 1949, a two-story house and three vacant lots were purchased on North Arsenal Street. Activities for young people included classes in cooking, sewing, and childcare. Swiftly, Mrs. Martin's ministry again outgrew the new location.

The Center continued to struggle financially, but the children were always fed a hot meal which in many instances was the only meal they received on a daily basis. Mrs. Martin would often go to local grocers to buy the cheapest items such as chicken wings at ten cents a pound and turnip greens at seven cents a pound. Everyone in the supermarket knew her and the works of the Center. As she walked down the aisles selecting food very carefully, people would hand her money to pay for the food she needed and the children would be fed for another day.

Although Mrs. Martin was a strict disciplinarian, she tempered it with love and a firm belief in the potential of each child she encountered. Grown men and women would return to the Center years after they had left the neighborhood to thank her for providing both love and discipline when they needed it. Edna Martin won the respect of the juvenile court and the public school administrators through her gift for working with teenage lawbreakers and helping them get back on the right track.

In many ways, Mrs. Martin had an impossible task, but she also had a deep faith and trust in God. Often she would pray to God about the many challenges she faced at the Center, keenly aware that God often accomplishes His tasks through other persons. One such person was Mr. John Lynn, Director of the Lilly Foundation, who learned of Mrs. Martin's work and was instrumental in bringing thousands of dollars into the ministry of the East Side Center. In 1965, the East Side Center moved from the North Arsenal quarters to a new building at 1970 Caroline

Avenue, funded in partnership with American Baptist Home Mission Society, American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis and American Baptist Churches of Indiana-Kentucky.

By 1968 the Center had a library, programs on housekeeping, parenthood, remedial reading, tutoring, arts & crafts, music, and parolee supervision with nineteen clubs, nine study classes, four basketball teams, and senior citizen groups in addition to the daycare.

Edna Martin died over 50 years ago on May 25, 1974, after a lifetime of Christian service. Edna Martin conceived and labored to give birth to a dream, the East Side Center, and in September 1974 the Center was renamed the Edna Martin Christian Center (EMCC) in honor of this faithful worker and founder.

Rev. Frank Alexander was selected as the first Executive Director following Mrs. Martin's passing. Our most recent leaders have been Rev. Dr. Larry Lindley, Tysha Hardy-Sellers and since January 1, 2020 our current President/CEO Barato Britt.

Beginning in 1995 at Indian Creek Baptist Camp in Bedford, our Youth Program has taken school-age children for a 4-day overnight camp where they enjoy morning and evening worship times, small groups, games, swimming, campfire and much more. Some of our current Youth Program staff had been campers, then camp counselors and now staff.

By the 2010s, the Center had again experienced a period of substantial growth, taking up residence in the newly renovated IPS School 37 building, now known as 37 Place, at 2605 E 25th St in 2013. Two years later, EMCC was blessed to open an intergenerational satellite location at 2259 Ralston Ave where Preschool, School-aged Youth Programs and Senior Angel activities now take place. Thanks to the generous support of the American Baptist Churches, United Way of Central Indiana, City of Indianapolis, Ruth Lilly Foundation and other partners, EMCC was able to remodel the facility to fit the needs of the individuals served. EMCC was also blessed to partner with KIPP Indy Public Schools by providing land on the campus for the first High School to be built in the community. KIPP Indy Legacy High opened its doors in 2019 and graduated its first class of Seniors in 2023.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, EMCC once again responded quickly to the evolving needs of area residents, pivoting most programs to virtual formats, and working proactively with area partners to somehow meet the incredible increase in need for food assistance and emergency financial assistance. EMCC saw its social services numbers increase from just over 1000 people served in 2019 to serving over 5,000 individuals in 2020, in just that department alone. Despite the unprecedented events of the pandemic, the Lord has truly Blessed this Ministry to stay in line with the vision that He gave to Edna Martin over 80 years ago: to trust in God, share His Good Word, and provide area residents with the tools and support needed to sustain themselves and their families.

Following the guidance of the EMCC Strategic Plan and the Martindale-Brightwood Quality of Life Plan, in 2023 EMCC launched our vision for affordable housing here in our community with the creation of the Edna Martin Community Based Development Organization (CBDO). Through the City's Vacant to Vibrant program our CBDO is currently rehabbing 2 homes and rebuilding 1 home in the community. Through a partnership with Intend Indiana, our CBDO

purchased 13 empty lots and will begin construction of new affordable housing homes in 2025 for families in our community.

The creation of 37 Place was a collaboration of EMCC, United Way of Central Indiana, Central Indiana Community Foundation and the City of Indianapolis. Part of the vision back in 2010 was someday Edna Martin Christian Center would own and operate the building as a community services hub for Martindale-Brightwood. After 2-years of conversation and negotiations, on August 21, 2024 the final paperwork was signed to transfer the building and property over to EMCC. We praise God for this incredible blessing!

While there was no money exchanged for the building and property, we know from an extensive property and building assessment that over \$7M will need to be spent over the next 5 years to renovate this 97-year old building into a suitable long-term home for EMCC and our current and future tenants in this 52,000 SF space. We are excited to continue to build on the vision and faith of our founder, Mrs. Edna Mae Barnes Martin.