

A Rich Woman In the 'Hood

Dorothy Moore grew up in a world of chauffeurs, debutante balls and fine china. Today, she's helping drug addicts and single moms in the worst parts of Dallas.

Throughout east Dallas, rows of run-down family businesses and dilapidated houses represent years of hopelessness and neglect. A quick-fix solution seems out of reach for many business owners and families. However, an unlikely crusader began targeting this community for good 16 years ago, and her efforts are paying off. Gang-related violence is down, the neighborhood schools are improving, and crack houses have been converted into homes for adults who are trying to change.

As president of Reconciliation Outreach, 66-year-old Dorothy Moore is living proof that God can use anyone to make a difference in the 'hood, as she affectionately calls it. She left a life of luxury years ago and has no regrets. In fact, in inner-city missions Moore says she has found true happiness and her reason for being.

Moore's upbringing hardly prepared her to work with the underprivileged. Her father, Harold Engh, made it through only eighth grade, but he quickly achieved the American dream by becoming president of the wire and cable company where he had once worked scrubbing floors.

Moore grew up in New York having her own chauffeur, chef and nanny. Her mother hired staff who had worked for prominent families so she could learn how to buy the socially appropriate silver and china.

During summers the Engh family spent time in Sycamore,

Illinois, where Moore's parents had been raised. Later, her father bought a company in Sycamore, and Moore attended school there for a couple of years.

"The chauffeur would take me to school, and I'd make him drop me off two blocks from school so the other kids wouldn't see him," recalls Moore, who didn't want to be so different from her classmates.

As a teen, she went to a prestigious boarding school for girls and became a New York debutante. She studied opera in college before turning her attention to philosophy and psychology.

Despite her privileged upbringing, Moore gained a heart of compassion for others. "I think all my life I identified with people who had pain or lack," she says.

In her early years, she would listen to their household staff talk about life's difficulties. When she traveled from New York to Illinois, staff members Jonas and Cora couldn't go into most restaurants because of their skin color. "That offense stuck with me strongly," she says.

After college Moore moved to San Diego. There she worked for a radio station as a talk-show host and sang on the side. Although she dated sometimes, she wasn't smitten until she met Bob Moore, a Navy lieutenant from west Texas.

"He was everything that a Texan should have been," she says. "I had dated lots of boys who were caught up in social things and money. I really wanted a man whom I could respect the way I respected my father."

The couple dated about six months and married in 1959. Because of their cultural differences, those early years were difficult. "You don't change a spoiled brat overnight into somebody that learns to be a servant," she admits about herself.

Experiencing God

After Bob graduated from the University of Texas Law School in Austin, the Moores spent a couple of years in Chicago. In 1974, Bob got an offer to work for an oil company in Dallas—and the timing couldn't have been better.

Having gotten close to filing for divorce because of family problems, Dorothy was invited to a Christian seminar. She went—and experienced a life change.

"I got on my knees and made a commitment to Christ," she says. "I had a total transformation and became deeply in love with Jesus."

Moore immersed herself in the Bible and was closely discipled by a friend for four years. She joined Highland Park Presbyterian (an affluent church that has been very supportive of her inner-city work).

In 1975 Bob was asked to take a position in Houston. When the couple moved, Moore felt like she had lost everything. "I was taken out of a cocoon of love and training to a whole new situation. I was miserable," she says.

Together they began attending St. Andrews Presbyterian Church,

where there was an openness to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Though skeptical of the spiritual gifts at first, Moore says she “began to see that these people who were Spirit-filled were accomplishing things that were important.” She too wanted whatever the Holy Spirit had in store for her.

Moore continued to grow spiritually, and within 10 years she was teaching, speaking in churches and serving as president of a Houston chapter Aglow International that was trying to bring about racial reconciliation.

In 1985, the Moores moved back to Dallas, and they quickly got involved at Hillcrest Church, a nondenominational congregation of about 5,000 attendees today, pastored by Morris Sheets.

About a year after they returned to Dallas, Moore joined a team to pray in the inner city of east Dallas near downtown. Based on the group’s research, the area they had chosen had the highest crime rate in the city.

There the group set up a couple of tents: one for the adults, the other for kids. Cambodian and Spanish translators were on hand. Within four days, Moore says, the group had attracted a large crowd.

One night when Moore was speaking, some Asian Americans came forward to receive Christ. She motioned for help from the Cambodian translator, who quickly discovered these were Vietnamese, not Cambodians.

“We started to pray,” Moore says, “and for the first time in my life, this nasal language came out of me. I began to speak in an Oriental tongue, and the kids began to cry. They could

understand what I was saying.”

After two weeks of tent ministry in east Dallas, the growing inner-city group became known as the East Dallas Crusaders for Christ. Sensing a need for a permanent presence in the inner city, Moore incorporated Reconciliation Outreach in 1987.

Rather than plant a church in the inner city, Moore decided to send the locals to Hillcrest every Sunday for training and discipleship. Hillcrest fully supported the decision. “This has been an effective way for the two groups of people to come together in relationships,” she says, “and it has supported me so I didn’t just get down there and die.”

Not surprisingly, there have been a few incidents with the children.

“You can’t take a child who has never been taught to say please and thank you and expect them to suddenly become nice, well-behaved church kids,” she says. “They will offend people. They will act in ways that are inappropriate in a north Dallas church.

“We’ve had some things happen that have been funny and some not so funny,” she adds. “But it has been healthy on both sides and brought a lot of friendship across the lines.”

According to Sheets, Moore is a visionary who is carrying out her God-given plan. “The dispossessed of Dallas are receiving emergency help and training through Reconciliation Outreach,” he says.

Feeling the need to establish a strong spiritual presence in the community, Moore launched an inner-city church in January.

“We still need the relationship with the suburban church and will continue to have it,” she explains, “but the sense of needing a church planted here in the inner city is very strong for us. Plus, getting 150 people in cars and buses every week gets to be very complicated.”

A ‘Holy Ghost Clean-Out’

For the first 10 years in east Dallas, Moore focused on youth ministry. Early on, she was amazed at the hunger these kids had for God and how free they felt to worship. “I think it was the first safe place many of these kids found where they could express what they felt and not be called sissies,” she says.

About five years ago, Moore began to build the adult program. Through generous donations from charities and foundations, the ministry has bought several run-down houses where drug deals previously took place. Volunteers from area churches and corporations such as UPS, FedEx and AT&T have helped repair the buildings and make them livable.

Two ministry homes, each with housemothers, are designed for women who are trying to get on their feet. Many of them have been addicted to drugs; others have been abused and need a safe harbor. Reconciliation Outreach also has three men’s houses, a children’s building and a day-care center. A new building containing 19 apartments is for individuals and families who need housing assistance until they can support themselves.

Chapel is held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at noon and at night. Willie Burnette leads many of the services and does a lot of the pastoring. Other programs offered at Reconciliation Outreach include share groups, personal-growth groups, prison ministry, after-school programs and business-skills classes. For many participants, one-on-one prayer time is critical.

"Most of these kids and adults live under what I call the 'curse of generations,'" says Moore, who is involved in inner-healing and deliverance ministry at Hillcrest Church. She has presented her "Breaking Generational Curses" seminar in churches throughout Texas and in India, Romania and Indonesia.

"You don't just put the gospel on top of other things. Many of these people have to have a 'Holy Ghost clean-out,' if you will. Then the gospel takes its rightful place and becomes the foundation of life itself for them," she explains.

Women who live in the homes are required to gather for prayer every day at 6 a.m.; the men meet earlier to accommodate their work schedules. "We take them in our own vehicles to job sites," Moore says. "That way the employers know they are safe in hiring them." Reconciliation Outreach also provides drug-testing as an incentive to potential employers.

Moore acknowledges that it is difficult for inner-city residents to find jobs—partly because of the current recessionary economy but also because most of them are undereducated and underqualified, and some have criminal records.

"There are all kinds of reasons for an employer not to hire

them,” she points out, “so we do everything we can—both in the spiritual and in the natural—to qualify them for jobs.”

Changing East Dallas

As Reconciliation Outreach continues to purchase neighborhood property, this community can't help but change. “You don't bring the presence of Christ and the body of Christ into a neighborhood without changing it,” Moore believes.

Approximately 80 percent of those who have gone through the organization's six-month and one-year programs stay clean and are able to enter the real world. “It's a long interview process to qualify,” she says, “and they are given every opportunity to make it.”

In 1999, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas honored Moore with an Unsung Heroines Award. She also has received a Dallas Independent School District award for her work with the district's alternative program.

To prepare participants to live responsibly and more self-sufficiently, the staff of Reconciliation Outreach teaches them how to manage money and requires they establish a savings program so they will have money to take with them when they leave. They are also taught about such things as good health and nutrition.

“Some of the people who have gone through our program may stay close to us for the rest of their lives, but many go back to their homes and families,” Moore says. “We've had lots of homes restored, and a lot of children brought back to single moms who had been farmed out to Grandma. We teach the mother

how to parent and the child how to get over some of the fears and abuse that went on in the homes before the parent came into the program.”

Moore started Reconciliation Outreach with \$5,000. Today the annual budget exceeds \$700,000. She says “public relations and being visible” make a difference in keeping the ministry alive. She also stresses the importance of building the trust of supporters.

“If people are going to give you money, you have to have an absolutely clean record. We use the same accounting methods that Billy Graham does, and they are gone over with a fine-tooth comb by the same people who do his books,” she says.

Reconciliation Outreach has eight full-time staff members. Other employees work on a stipend basis and receive free on-site housing.

Administrator Jacqueline Lucas went through the program almost four years ago. She didn’t have drug problems; she just needed spiritual peace. “I had everything I needed, but I was the most miserable person in the world,” she says.

“When I first went into the program, I thought, What is a woman like Dorothy doing down here?” admits 36-year-old Lucas. She quickly saw that Moore ,though firm, has a tender heart for helping others.

Although Moore hasn’t named a successor, two of her four children are involved in the ministry. Holly, who has a master’s degree in reading disabilities, works at the organization’s day-care center and tutors students. Clay

oversees the ministry's outdoor market, which contains new and donated items for raising funds and is a source of jobs for residents. Moore's husband, a Dallas attorney, provides legal advice.

Almost 500 volunteers—many from local churches—work for the ministry in a year. Moore estimates that people from more than 50 churches helped in 2002. Internships also are available.

In addition to her inner-city ministry, Moore is active in the community. Dallas is filled with churches that have strong programs, but Moore sees a need for reconciliation across denominational lines. To achieve this:

- * She is helping organize a service to be held April 12 at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. The event, Glorify Jesus, is a grassroots attempt to unify the body of Christ to pray for the city.

- * Reconciliation Outreach has joined Christian Emergency Network and will serve as a site for grief counseling and CPR if a citywide emergency arises.

- * The Moores and friends Ted and Betty Gellert recently purchased the Double D Ranch in nearby Mesquite, Texas, and intend to make the property available for Christian concerts and evangelistic events. This summer, Moore plans to partner with Campus Crusade for Christ to send local inner-city kids to the ranch for a Christian-camp experience.

Despite her full schedule, Moore shows no signs of slowing down.

"I think the whole concept of retirement is so far away from what the Scriptures teach," she says. "The more you grow in Christ, the more you want to serve whatever He asks."

As long as God wants her involved in missions work, Moore will be there. "I love what I do—I'm probably happier now than I've ever been in my life," she says.

While noting that life isn't pain-free for anyone, Moore wishes others could have the joy she has found. "I cannot guarantee others of being happy or always having the good life, but I would like to help them find the same joy I've found just by living Christianity," she says. "It's living it every day in such a way that you go home and feel satisfied."

Out of Her Comfort Zone

Dorothy Moore could have settled for being a Dallas socialite, but instead she's become an advocate for the poor.

It grieves Dorothy Moore that the church isn't more involved in inner-city missions.

"My whole desire is to let Jesus be seen in the inner city," says the founder of Reconciliation Outreach in east Dallas. "The church has pretty well retreated from her place of prominence in the inner city. We either became a social welfare agency that lost the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit or we became so spiritually minded that we forgot that people who are hungry can't hear the Word."

In the past the church was vital to the community, but in

general the government is replacing the church, says Moore, who doesn't receive any government funding. If she receives federal funds she won't be able to offer Bible studies.

Most of the money Reconciliation Outreach has received for its buildings and property comes from charities, foundations and corporations, not from churches. "I don't think the church sees this in the same light as they see missions," Moore says.

One church that sees the need is Creek Crossing Harvest Church, a multicultural congregation pastored by Dan Alemán in nearby Mesquite, Texas. Like Moore, Alemán has a heart for unity and helping people in need. In the future he would like for his members to volunteer on-site at the ministry.

According to Moore, many suburban churches have tried to plant churches or missions in the inner city but often without bearing much fruit. "The first thing the church needs to do is learn how to minister to the poor. If they've never done this, they risk being very naive, misused and hurt. They need to work with those who have had experience in it so they won't make so many mistakes."

Moore says she has learned from other groups. For example, she received some initial training at David Wilkerson's Times Square Church in New York City.

She helped Victory Outreach find a house in Dallas years ago. While teaching their women, she learned a lot about drugs and inner-city problems. She also helped Youth With A Mission establish a house on the east side of the city.

The staff and volunteers of Reconciliation Outreach are

willing to reach out beyond their borders to share things they have learned with other churches. “We want to be part of the picture of reconciliation—which is, to me, the reason we are here.”

Mom and Mentor

Dorothy Moore’s godly influence inspired Raul Magdaleno to turn his life around.

Raul Magdaleno, 22, has volunteered for dozens of nonprofit organizations—but never has he met someone like Dorothy Moore, founder of Reconciliation Outreach in east Dallas.

“She gives unconditionally without getting something in return,” he says. “She continues to fight the battle and never gives up.”

Magdaleno grew up in east Dallas and met Moore when he was 13 years old. Moore sent him to a Kids Across America camp, which changed his life. Later he became involved in clown ministry for Reconciliation Outreach.

Magdaleno describes Moore as the most “international” person he knows. “She doesn’t see color,” he says. Moore stood by him and his mother during a family crisis years ago and has become his “second mom” and mentor.

“Dorothy made me see Christianity from a different perspective,” he says. “She taught me the true meaning of the ‘joy of the Lord is my strength.’”

Moore encouraged Raul to pursue an education. He is the only one in his family of 10 who has graduated from high school. Today he attends college and works full time. He also has an internship at Reconciliation Outreach.

“If it had not been for Dorothy planting a seed in my life,” says Magdaleno, who continues to meet weekly with Moore, “I wouldn’t have made it. She was one of the main influences that kept me going.”

Magdaleno has contributed more than 28,000 hours of community service and was honored with the U.S. President’s Student Service Award in August.

As for the future, Magdaleno says he wants to “turn around and touch someone the way Dorothy has touched my life.”

“I’m just an example of one of the thousands of people who have been touched by this ministry,” he says. “I’m blessed that I’m able to give back.”

Carol Chapman Stertzner is a Dallas-based correspondent for Charisma.

For more information about Moore’s inner-city ministry, contact Reconciliation Outreach at (214) 821-9192, or visit their Web site at