

How One Local Church Helped a Chicago Neighborhood's Crime Rate Drop 42%

Wilfredo "Choco" De Jesus grew up in Humboldt Park, one of the most crime-ridden neighborhoods in Chicago. He lost his own brother to gang violence and saw firsthand what broken, desperate people are willing to do to get by.

But now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Pastor De Jesus and his New Life Covenant Church are radically transforming the very neighborhood he grew up in.

"I have passion and compassion toward people who are suffering, who are broken," De Jesus says on the "Charisma News" podcast. "I believe the Lord allowed me to see things like this and live it ... in the early 1970s and '80s in Humboldt Park."

But De Jesus doesn't just have compassion. He has faith. In fact, when the 2008 recession hit, De Jesus and his church decided they simply weren't going to participate in it. After all, De Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven operates in a different economy, which is the economy of faith."

Instead of tightening their belts, New Life Covenant purchased buildings in some of the toughest parts of the neighborhood. They converted former drug stores and liquor stores into medical clinics and nonprofit thrift shops. Some buildings became ministries for the poor.

One corner in particular was known for gang activity. But when the church purchased the property, the area drastically changed.

"According to the police department, that corner was a hub for

violence,” De Jesus says. “And since we bought that big building in a corner in Chicago, crime rate has come down by 42%. ... You have to get involved in this. You just cannot be in a corner or in a community and not pay taxes and not acclimate, not get involved in the problems in that community. You have to be able to, as a church, as a ministry, do something about what’s happening with the violence and the injustice.”

The only group that hated what De Jesus’ church was doing was the gang community. De Jesus says he even got death threats. Listen to the podcast to hear how the Holy Spirit moved De Jesus to respond.