

FAQ – Sacred Settlement Open Door

What is a Sacred Settlement?

A Sacred Settlement is a tiny home community placed on church land where one third of the homes are occupied with people who are resourced and have never been homeless. The other two thirds are occupied by people who have experienced chronic homelessness and want healing, restoration and dignity with supportive friends and neighbors.

Our future tiny home community is part of a growing effort to use church properties to address the root causes of chronic homelessness. We have partnered with another organization, Settled, and other churches from different denominations to provide more than just housing — we offer a way of life.

FULL COMMUNITY MODEL:

- Intentional neighbors: People who willingly change their lifestyle to live life alongside formerly homeless neighbors.
- Permanent homes: Small, simple homes are gathered together to provide safety and help promote community.
- Cultivated places: The homes are placed on religious land that is carefully adapted to meet the needs of the community.
- Purposeful work: Everyone in the community shares in the labor and is compensated fairly for their work.
- Supportive friends: Each person has one or more helpers to navigate services and to be supported with friendships.
- Over the next two years, in partnership with other churches and community members, we are working on designing and building this community.

Why Has Open Door Decided to Plant a Sacred Settlement?

As a church we are responding to God's call seen all throughout the Bible to care for the poor, outcasts, and marginalized people in our society. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" We believe we are following God's heart to care for the most vulnerable people among us who Jesus calls his very own 'brothers and sisters;' we are seeking to follow Jesus in this way.

Open Door has had a long partnership with Settled. In 2021, Open Door began sending people to do outreach in the unhoused communities in St Paul in partnership with Settled and Walking with a Purpose. In 2022, Open Door build a tiny home on our land to support the Sacred Settlement being planted in St Paul, which one of our pastors moved into in October 2022. In 2023, Open Door began building another tiny home in partnership with other churches. The leadership team at Open Door has been prayerfully considering partnering with Settled in developing a Sacred Settlement on Open Door land for nearly two years. During this two-year timeframe, we have had numerous meetings, workshops, and facilitated sessions with Settled to fully understand how we might go about undertaking this effort. Open Door put a leadership team together to design this Sacred Settlement this past summer of 2024.

How many tiny homes will be in Sacred Settlement Open Door?

There will be twelve tiny homes at Sacred Settlement Open Door. Eight homes are for people who have experienced chronic homelessness. Four homes are for people who haven't experienced homelessness but desire to be an intentional neighbor with everyone in the tiny home community. The church building will have a specific area dedicated as a 'common house' for those living in the Sacred Settlement to have a living space, separate from the rest of the church.

Why Has Open Door Chosen to Plant a Sacred Settlement in an "Outer-Ring" Suburb of Minneapolis?

Homelessness is a state-wide problem in Minnesota, especially in the Twin Cities. Unfortunately, it is not solely an urban problem and, therefore, cannot solely be solved by urban churches. Open Door wants to respond to this very real need in our community. Homelessness is not a distance issue; there are about 35 people sleeping in their cars each night within Maple Grove.

Open Door wants to take advantage of its expansive land ownership to open its doors to formerly homeless neighbors and work to address this problem in a way that fully expresses the heart of our mission. The use of religious land is federally protected by The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), enabling our church to utilize its land to carry out its mission and vision unencumbered by restrictions (such as zoning discrimination).

Additionally, in 2023, Minnesota passed a groundbreaking new law that *encourages* or *allows* faith communities to fulfill their sacred mandate of loving some of our society's poor, outcasts and most vulnerable. Now cities and municipalities have a roadmap to permit and approve Sacred Settlements more efficiently to help eradicate homelessness in Minnesota.

Through our extensive research and vetting process, we have determined that Settled's Full Community Model is the best way for us to fully express our church's mission and show love and support for our unhoused neighbors.

How Long Will It Take Open Door to Build the Sacred Settlement?

Open Door is following Settled's roadmap for planting a Sacred Settlement. There are three stages of the process prior to the Grand Opening. Settled provides guidance, tools, approaches, experience and works side-by-side to support the church's efforts. These three stages, on average, take anywhere from 9 months to 27 months. The earliest Grand Opening date would be Fall of 2026, assuming all the pieces are properly in place beforehand.

- **Discern** – the church answers “how might a Sacred Settlement enhance our church’s mission?” The Settled team worked with Open Door leadership to educate us on the Full Community Model, build a leadership team, tour other local Sacred Settlements, and walk the church through a discernment process. This stage typically takes anywhere from three to six months. Open Door spent roughly a year praying and thinking through how we might make this happen. During this discernment process, Open Door partnered with six other churches to help launch the first Sacred Settlements.
- **Plan** – Open Door is in this stage right now. The Settled team is working with Open Door to help design an operational framework to implement the five elements of the Full Community Model in our Sacred Settlement. This stage is a combination of employing Settled’s best practices and processes/procedures and customizing it to our church, our neighborhood, and its needs. A key part of this stage is listening to our congregation, our city and our community and obtaining input so that we can continue to mold and shape our Sacred Settlement and employ our unique strengths and mission. This stage takes three – nine months and is all about preparing our hearts and our space to be able to fully express our mission and commitment to loving our neighbors.
- **Build** – This stage is about renovating the church land and building the Sacred Settlement. This stage is also about building and equipping volunteers and ensuring everything materializes so that the Sacred Settlement can be opened. Settled provides building expertise, helps keep the momentum, and ensures all elements are in place before the Grand Opening. This stage takes anywhere from three – nine months.

After the Sacred Settlement is established, the **Steward** stage is an everlasting commitment to deepen relationships for everyone connected to the Sacred Settlement community. We are establishing a permanent community where we hope every person grows deep roots and enduring loyalty to one another and the land they live on.

What Ways Are People Encouraged to Regain Their Dignity?

The Full Community model offered in a Sacred Settlement is designed to help residents meet their basic needs (food, water, safety, dignity, and purpose). The very design of the model is one that works to stimulate stability and growth. Each neighbor is surrounded by community and intentional supportive friends and professionals to help them heal and move forward in life.

How Will Open Door Select People who are Experiencing Homelessness to Move into the Sacred Settlement?

It is important to note that all churches planting Sacred Settlements seek to know their neighborhoods and want their Sacred Settlements to be a neighborhood asset. Open Door is no different in that regard.

Each host church sets its parameters regarding who it accepts into its Sacred Settlement, such as no sex offenders or violent criminal offenses. Open Door is currently customizing these parameters. While the specifics are currently in development, all incoming neighbors will fill out an application, submit to a comprehensive state and national background check, be interviewed, review the policies, and sign off on a Good Neighbor Agreement to abide by community rules and standards before being offered a home in the community.

We have partnered closely with Settled and learned from other churches. The leadership at Sacred Settlement Mosaic told us: “We have found healthy and beautiful relationships develop with our church community, including many young families with children and elderly adults.” We are inspired by what is possible and what is happening.

What Happens if There Are Issues with Residents in the Neighborhood?

All residents, including neighbors coming off the streets and intentional neighbors, must go through a background check, pay their rent, abide by civil law, and follow the rules of the Sacred Settlement. If they are consistently unable to pay rent and are not taking advantage of Purposeful Work opportunities, and/or are a consistent disruption to the community, they will be asked to leave. In these circumstances, other candidates will be considered and able to move in upon successfully making it through the approval process.

In addition to intentional neighbors and church support staff, one of the key elements of managing a Sacred Settlement is the purposeful relationships the church and Settled maintain

with public and civic organizations and emergency responders (e.g., police, fire), and other valuable services.

In the case of an infraction, there is a process in place to actively address it with consequences that range from a fine to eviction. While these measures are in place to address infractions and ensure the safety and stability of the community, both research and experience have taught us that deep relationships are the most effective in ensuring people follow the rules due to the trust and daily interactions that take place. In other Sacred Settlements, we have learned that neighbors want to honor those relationships and have responded well to the graceful truth of holding the line with regard to the rules and policies.

What Criminal History Can a Person Have and Still Be Approved to Live On-Site?

Criminal background checks are performed prior to approval. Violent or sexual criminal offenses would prevent a potential resident's approval. Some residents do have previous criminal backgrounds (including offenses such as bounced checks, drug possession, DUI, etc.), which would not necessarily preclude their approval. Each background check is scrutinized prior to approval to ensure applicants are a right fit for the community and that the right support system is in place to help them on their healing journey.

What Social Services and Support is offered in Maple Grove?

Many social services organizations serve the needs of Maple Grove and the surrounding communities. Open Door will be working with Settled to pull together a network map of Supportive Friends that includes agencies that can help us fully meet the needs of our Sacred Settlement residents. Open Door is currently building partnerships with organizations, the city and county to ensure the neighbors get the resources they need.

Supportive relationships are critical for healing from trauma and associated disorders, and a full network of professional services support for residents will be established and utilized.

Are Neighbors Required to be Drug- and Alcohol-Free?

No illegal substances will be allowed. Neighbors will be required to abide by the law when it comes to legal substances.

If someone were to have an addiction that would spill out into the community, it becomes a community problem and an opportunity to offer help. We want to see people become the best versions of themselves and will continue to point them toward healing and wholeness.

Furthermore, we are building relationships with trusted partners in recovery for if and when our neighbors need professional help.

Note: Though this reflects our most up to date thinking regarding this, we are still in the process of designing the community policies and have not made any final decisions

Will People Be Allowed to Sign/Panhandle?

No. Panhandling will not be allowed on site or in the surrounding area. Our neighbors who were previously unhoused are encouraged to engage in multiple purposeful work opportunities, negating the need to panhandle. It is important to note that research proves the majority of people in chronic homelessness suffer from PTSD, chronic health conditions, and traumatic brain injuries (TBI), resulting in an inability to focus, difficulty learning, and poor memory. This makes holding a regular job nearly impossible and has prevented them from having a meaningful role in society.

In other Sacred Settlements we have seen wonderful results in neighbors taking advantage of intentional work opportunities and our Good Neighbor Agreement (signed by each resident) will help ensure that pan handling will not take place. (Again, these policies are still in process).

The Full Community Model addresses these factors and provides opportunities along with teaching new skill sets, coaching, and supporting neighbors for active participation in purposeful work for which they can be proud and earn a dignified income to pay their rent and bills.

How have the schools at Open Door Responded?

The School leadership of both schools at Open Door are in support and are enthusiastic about being neighbors with this community. Sacred Settlements are a safe place for kids to live in or near. We believe the community will enhance the relationships with the schools and neighborhood. Further, we will be working with each school in the design of our Sacred Settlement policies and guidelines.

What is the Number of People that Can Live in Each Unit?

Single units have a maximum capacity of 1. Double units for couples have a maximum capacity of 2. Intentional Neighbors often design and build homes to match their household needs (family of four or couple who works from home). These units do not have a limit to the number of people but are designed to accommodate the intentional household.

What is the Support Structure for the Sacred Settlement?

The Full Community model is deeply immersed in relationships that help guide neighbors towards wholeness and wellness in their daily lives. A robust structure is in place comprised of the following team of people who help govern the community and ensure it remains safe and beautiful:

- **Property Manager** who leads regular home walkthroughs and who cares for the property, cleanliness, and safety of the homes, land, church building, and community.
- **Sacred Settlement lead or couple** who run weekly neighbor huddles and family dinners where rules are enforced and trusted relationships are built in order to create a sense of stability and security within the community.
- **Stewardship team** of 5-7 people who operate like a board of directors to help support the community, create new policies, and enforce decisions that affect the health and safety of the whole community.
- **Intentional Neighbors** who are living their daily lives in the community.
- **Supportive Friends** who function as advocates, mentors, and helpers for each neighbor to set goals, care for their medical needs, and be a safe space to support neighbors in their daily lives.
- **Social workers and social service providers** regularly check in with neighbors to support them in their care, benefits, wellness, and mental health.
- **Every neighbor in our community** empowers other neighbors to follow the rules and keep the community safe.

Who Is Responsible for Repairs and Upkeep on the Tiny Homes and Common/Shared Areas?

Open Door ensures all homes receive the care, updates, and repairs needed and that all homes are cared for via our Property Manager. He/She works with the facilities team at the church to ensure all necessary repairs or updates are completed on shared/common areas. A separate capital and operating budget is being built for the Sacred Settlement. The Stewardship Team will approve the budget for ongoing stewardship of the Sacred Settlement with active management from the Property Manager.

What do Neighbors in the Sacred Settlement do for Employment?

There is an expectation that every resident contributes to the community through purposeful work. There are requirements for paying rent and being an active community member. There are work opportunities and workshops made available to the neighbors, as well as supportive friends helping neighbors move towards their work goals. There are not requirements for a streamline job, just like we wouldn't require any neighbor in our Maple Grove neighborhoods to have a streamline job. In other Sacred Settlements we have seen wonderful results in neighbors taking

advantage of intentional work opportunities and our Good Neighbor Agreement (signed by each resident) will help ensure neighbors in the community are able to make an income in healthy and productive ways. (Again, these policies are still in process).

Are There Rules for Faith Engagement for Those Who Are Formerly Homeless Neighbors?

No. While all Sacred Settlements are owned and operated by active faith communities, participation in the spiritual life of the church is voluntary for neighbors. All churches who agree to host a Sacred Settlement agree not to proselytize or mandate church attendance. At Open Door, everyone a part of the Sacred Settlement is welcome, but not required, to participate in the spiritual life of the church.

Get in Touch with Open Door

- Learn more about Open Door's planting of a Sacred Settlement: www.thedoor.org/settled
- To contact the church for questions regarding the Sacred Settlement, email Rose Larson at rlarson@thedoor.org
- Learn more about Settled: www.settled.org