



# RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF NEWNESS

EVERYONE DESERVES A CHANCE TO "BEGIN ANEW."

*Begin Anew spring 2019 graduates*

As believers, we walk in newness of life because we have been given not only the gift of salvation but also a new beginning in life. Romans 6:4 (KJV) says, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up . . . even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Begin Anew, a faith-based ministry in Nashville, Tennessee, serves men and women in poverty to help them find "newness of life." Executive director Heather Norvell said, "Everyone deserves a chance to begin anew and walk a journey to a brighter future."

Scattered throughout Middle Tennessee in the area around Nashville are four Begin Anew sites. These sites grew from an idea Creely Wilson, the director of Nashville Baptist Association's WMU leadership team, had when she attended a Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC) conference in 1996. At the conference, she learned about a new ministry being developed to help women rise from poverty.

## LISTENING TO GOD

"As I listened to the presentation, I prayed, *God, we need this ministry in Nashville, Tennessee,*" Creely said.

She sensed God was calling her to be the one to start it.

Creely shared her vision with Candy Phillips, the associate director of the Nashville Baptist Association's WMU leadership team. With the team's prayer and support, a CWJC site was established in Nashville in October 1997.

Beginning with just ten participants, the ministry has grown to 210 students weekly and more than 300 volunteers. Begin Anew is a nationally certified CWJC/Christian Men's Job Corps (CMJC) site. CWJC/CMJC serves thousands of individuals at nearly 200 registered and certified sites throughout the US and the world. Like many CWJC sites, the Nashville site provides classes in high school equivalency, English language learning (ELL), computer and job skills, Bible study, and mentoring. In February 2003 it became a 501(c)3 organization, and in 2008

it added men's ministries. Then in 2016 the ministry's name was changed to Begin Anew of Middle Tennessee.

### **REACHING FAMILIES AND CULTURES**

Heather explained the ministry takes a holistic approach to reaching families. She said, "It is our goal at Begin Anew to create a safe and loving environment for children entrusted to our care while their parents attend class. Begin Anew provides games, a small snack and drink, and structured activities for all children, which includes tutoring for the older children and Bible story time. The program is designed to allow all children from different backgrounds and cultures to join together and learn to show mutual respect to each other."

People from diverse cultural backgrounds may feel they are on the fringes because they can sometimes be misunderstood, she said. "Begin Anew provides an opportunity for everyone to be seen and treated as someone made in the image of God. When people from other cultures come to Begin Anew, they find the love of Christ through the staff and volunteers who treat them with kindness and respect."

The adults who attend classes find small classes led by volunteers eager to teach and make a personal investment of time, Heather said. "Each student attends educational classes, has access to community resources, and is matched with an encourager (mentor) who provides support, encouragement, and accountability. A student attends four hours of class a week at no cost."

### **HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY AND BEYOND**

God has worked in many ways through Begin Anew. For Penina, a refugee from Zambia, the ministry has had a life-changing impact. When she came to the US she had no formal schooling because her family had lived in refugee camps for most of her life. As an 18-year-old, she was too old to attend traditional school but still wanted to learn.

Education has been her pursuit because, "It's not an amount of money: it's only a key," she said. "You can't open the door without education. It opens your mind. You are different. You think when you learn."

Penina credited God for what has happened in her life through Begin Anew.

"If not for God, I wouldn't be who I am today," she said. "He can lift up anything."

Through Begin Anew she is earning her high school equivalency and wants her son to get his education so he can do anything he wants. She is also working and sending money back to Congo, where she started an orphanage five years ago.

For some students, involvement at Begin Anew has allowed them to further their education post high school equivalency. In 2021, Kina Bell Jones received the Sybil Bentley Dove Award, and Georgia Alexander received the Faye Dove Scholarship. Kina plans to pursue a degree in medical office administrative work at Remington College, and Georgia plans to study to become an electrical engineer at Nashville State Community College. In addition to these individual honors given by the WMU Foundation, the ministry as a whole received the CWJC Site Development Grant, which allowed for expansion and improvements.

The impact of Begin Anew is so significant, current and former students refer their friends, families, and neighbors to the ministry. In 2018 there were so many requests for ELL classes at one site the coordinator had to create a wait list.

"One evening the program manager noticed a number of students showing up and sitting in the hallway of the church during classes," Heather remembered. "When one of the translators helped [the program manager] talk with the students, she realized the students thought they literally had to come up to the church to 'wait' in order to be added to the classes."

Each year, the WMU Foundation provides awards, grants, and scholarships to site participants and sites. Visit [wmufoundation.com/jobcorps](http://wmufoundation.com/jobcorps) to donate a one-time or recurring monthly gift.

### **EATING WORMS FOR THANKSGIVING**

Cultural differences like that can often present surprises. Heather also told the story of a Thanksgiving dinner where one of those surprises was a highlight.

"Every Thanksgiving we invite students to bring food dishes from their country of origin to share with their site and enjoy an evening of savory and sweet treats together," she said. "One year, a student brought a dish with live worms in it to share with their fellow students and volunteers because the recipe was treasured in their country of origin. A few of the volunteers actually tried the dish to support the student."

Even though many students are from different religious backgrounds, they all must attend Bible study. At first, they question this requirement, but Heather said, "At graduation, many of the graduates ask if they can return to Bible study. Our students invite others along for the journey, knowing the gospel may be the most important truth we can share."

In 2020, Begin Anew served 33 countries of origin from six continents. Many refugees served by Begin Anew come to the US with higher education degrees. But because their education is not recognized by US educational institutions, they must start over with high school classes to attend colleges or trade schools.

### **ADDRESSING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL POVERTY**

It's not just refugees or immigrants who come to Begin Anew. Poverty levels are high for many of the residents of Davidson County. Heather said 60 percent of those in poverty in Davidson County are female, and one-third don't have a high school diploma. The racial composition is 62 percent White, 27.6 percent Black, and 9.5 percent other. Single-mother households constitute the largest part of the population.

"Begin Anew empowers individuals to overcome the obstacles caused by poverty by providing education, mentors, and resources," Heather said.

In a place that has churches of multiple denominations every few blocks, as well as other religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, it can sometimes be difficult to make people aware of their spiritual poverty, Heather said. In addition to providing education, Begin Anew helps anyone in need because "people need to understand their true need [for] our Savior Jesus Christ," Heather said.

Those working minimum-wage jobs "face impossible choices between food and medicine, getting to work or paying the heating bill, repairing the car or paying rent," Heather said. "They feel hopeless and lack the resources, training, or support to change their circumstances."

### **ANSWERED PRAYERS**

Although volunteers at Begin Anew regularly reach out to their communities, in March 2020, it was the opposite. A tornado hit the main office, and volunteers from the community came to help the ministry get back up and running. These volunteers were an answer to prayer that God would provide cleanup, temporary storage, and replacement furniture.

God continues to show His faithfulness in filling needed staff positions. And these new people have brought new energy with them.

### **JOIN IN PRAYER**

Heather had several prayer requests.

Pray for the Begin Anew prayer initiative to bring about a revival in the lives of staff, volunteers, students, and the extended families of everyone involved.

Pray for staff and volunteers to have opportunities for gospel conversations with students who need to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Pray for an abundance of volunteers as Begin Anew trusts God to lead it into the next phase of ministry using in-person learning and online classes.

Pray staff would have ears to hear and eyes to see truth and the wisdom to know when and how to help students.

Pray staff and volunteers would be unified around Begin Anew's mission and serve together with joyful hearts.

Pray God would open the door for future sites and make clear the areas where Begin Anew needs to expand as an organization to bring Him glory.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from The Holy Bible, King James Version.

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**VIRGINIA KREIMEYER** writes from her home in Texas where she has worked with CWJC and Friendship International of Austin and currently teaches English as a second language.

Episode 50 of On the Journey Conversations, "Transforming Lives," is a conversation between Sandy Wisdom-Martin and Lena Plunk of national WMU about WMU Compassion Ministries, including CWJC/CMJC. Find it at [wmu.com/podcast](http://wmu.com/podcast), Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts.



# Nashville: Relentless Pursuit of Newness



## FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

**BEFORE THE SESSION:** Read the article, and choose facts to highlight about Begin Anew and the services it offers. Write these on a board or present them in your introduction to the session.

1. Serve snacks. Include at least one dish with gummy worms.
2. Ask a volunteer to read Romans 6:4.
3. Together, discuss the question: *What does it mean for us as believers to “walk in newness of life?”*
4. Use the examples of Kina Bell Jones and Penina in the “High School Equivalency and Beyond” section to explain Begin Anew’s high school and post high school equivalency services.
5. Ask a volunteer to read the first two paragraphs of the section,

“Eating Worms for Thanksgiving.”  
 Ask: *How would you feel if you were presented with a dish of worms?*  
 Together, discuss the importance of food as a part of culture and of showing respect to those from different backgrounds.

6. Read aloud each request Begin Anew shared, and pray silently together after each one. Close by asking a volunteer to pray aloud for Begin Anew and other ministries like it.



## FOR FAMILY STUDY:

**BEFORE THE SESSION:** Look online for fun facts about Tennessee, specifically Nashville. Display these creatively for your family to look at during your study. If your family has visited Tennessee, display pictures from your trip, and ask them to recall fun memories.

1. Explain that most areas have needs visitors never see. Share statistics from the section, “Addressing Physical and Spiritual Poverty.” Using the section, “Listening to God,” summarize how Begin Anew meets these needs.
2. Discuss who might be reached by such a ministry. Share its impact on entire families, including children and people from other cultural backgrounds.
3. Blindfold everyone. Describe the scene in “Eating Worms for Thanksgiving” while giving each person a bowl of gummy worms to eat.
4. Explain the importance of food in many cultures, and ask family members to consider how they can show respect to those who come from a different culture.
5. Ask a volunteer to read Romans 6:4. Ask: *What does it mean to walk in newness of life?*
6. Give children small snack bags of gummy worms. Explain that it is a reminder to pray for Begin Anew. Pray together over the requests Heather Norvell shared.



## FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Read the article, and highlight the services Begin Anew provides.
2. Read Romans 6:4 in two or three translations. Consider: *What does it mean to “walk in newness of life?”*
3. Research local statistics regarding poverty, religious and cultural background, education levels, etc. Search for ministries in your area working to address physical and spiritual needs, and consider how you might become involved.
4. Read the section, “Answered Prayers.” Look back on your life, and write down unexpected ways God has answered your prayers.
5. Read Heather Norvell’s prayer requests regarding Begin Anew. Pray for Begin Anew and similar ministries in your area. Ask God to give you the wisdom to help with unmet needs in your community.