A neighborhood doesn’t just happen. Oh sure, you have neighbors. We all, for the most part, have neighbors. But the fact of the matter is, do you know who they are? Have you bothered getting to know them? If a neighborhood is to be a vital, active, empowering part of our lives, we will have to work hard at revisiting our neighbors. There are no textbook solutions. To bring back a vibrant, dynamic, empowering neighborhood, it starts with you.

The first thing that building a neighborhood needs is for someone (or perhaps a pair of someones) to step forward and be willing to organize an initial meeting of the neighbors. This obviously takes some time and energy. With the aid of only a few other volunteers, leafleting the neighborhood is a good first step. Leaflets should describe their intentions and set a meeting (including time, date, and place—a driveway or garage works). A meeting will allow interested parties to share their concerns and air their aspirations and fears. It acts as a launching point for the development of a viable neighborhood.

Undoubtedly, it takes courage to step up and organize such a meeting. Some will doubt themselves and in moments of reflection will ask, “Why bother? What is the payoff?” As we pointed out in our last essay (dated 4/1/10), neighborhoods will enable us to live together in peace and without fear. Our efforts will give us pride and motivate us to become active members in the future of our community.

But what does a neighborhood look like? There is no clear formula. Some will be larger than others but, generally speaking, each should be fairly small. This is mainly for practical purposes. It is easier to get things done and have everyone agree on a particular direction. Small groups versus a large one. Geographically, the boundaries of a neighborhood should be established by roads, parks, historical buildings, railroad tracks, waterways, or shopping centers. Setting the boundaries is a very important first step. It sets the stage for other necessary steps.

Once we know where the neighborhood is, then it is time to spread the word and encourage people to join in the fun. It isn’t fun only because of block parties and neighborhood events that may ensue, it is fun because it is about improving security and safety. These are fundamental necessities for a livable neighborhood. No one wants to worry about vandals, drug dealers, violent dogs, speeding cars, or one wants to worry about vandals, drug dealers, violent dogs, speeding cars, or camping centers. Setting the boundaries is a very important first step. It sets the stage for other necessary steps.

I’m one of those baby boomers who never recovered from my early childhood religious experiences. I wanted to be a minister. One of my early role models was my friend’s father, the minister at our church. He was not your typical, don’t rock the boat, don’t upset the congregation, type minister. He provoked you into listening and taking action. He was a big opponent of DDT. At the time, DDT was hailed as the miracle poison that would save corn and soybeans from weed ruination. It was a new miracle aid for farmers. Unfortunately, we lived in a rural community. That spelled trouble. I suppose some of you are going to say Christians can be. In the end, he was right. DDT was a disaster for the environment. And for me, it spelled a rocky road concerning my relationship to the church. I never really fully recovered.

In 1980, I renewed my faith. “Sunday Morning” came on the air. I had a front row seat and didn’t need to go any further than my living room. Charles Kuralt would deliver the sermon until April, 1994. Ninety minutes of top notch commentary on major headlines, in-depth stories on the arts, science, the environment, weather, education, world affairs. In a deal with CBS, he continued doing his “On the Road” odyssey, logging over one million miles on the nation’s back roads, visiting places you never heard of, talking to anyone he found interesting, ending each show with about a minute of nature, film by the photographer that traveled with him. They went through six Winnebagos over the years. What a Sunday morning service. Charles Kuralt passed away on Sunday morning March 3, 1994. He was dismayed by a new wave of anchor people taking over. He said, “I am ashamed that so many anchorman haven’t any basis on which to make a news judgment, can’t edit, can’t write, and can’t cover a story.” It looked like my “church in exile” was over.

Along came Charles Osgood, who stepped in for Kuralt. Osgood has been described as a poet-in-residence at CBS. Kuralt said of him, “He is one of the last, great, broadcast writers.” Sunday Morning didn’t miss a beat. The quality, the depth, the integrity, all stayed put.

For thirty years this “church in exile” has flourished. Oh, I’ve missed a few services here and there, but when I’m feeling down and blue, when it looks like all is lost, I sit in front of the TV on Sunday morning from 8-9:30am, and this funny thing happens: I get renewed, my faith gets energized, and I get this overwhelming feeling that there is something out there for all of us. The world is a lot bigger than I thought, and all that good will beat out the bad.

Look at this list of choir members Kuralt and Osgood have counted. The time is now and we’ve got lots of people to support you in this neighborhood endeavor. So let’s get started. Call 342-1593 if you are interested, or e-mail us at <wnukil@rogers.com>, or Better yet, attend the next Nurturing Neighborhood meeting at the public library, on April 29th, at 6 pm.