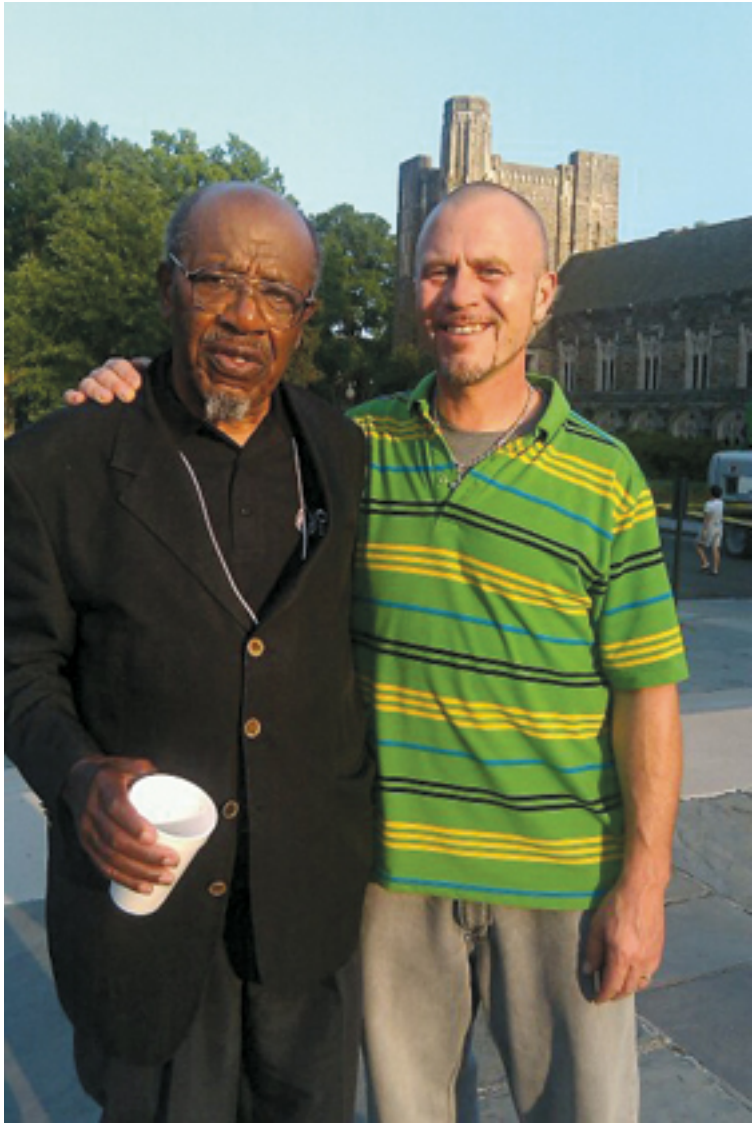

Pictured:: CCDA Founder, John Perkins and Marque Jensen at Duke University Reconciliation Conference.

Twin Cities residents will have a special opportunity. The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) will be holding its national conference in Downtown Minneapolis, and local residents will be able to explore this amazing group first hand. I attended my first CCDA conference almost 20 years ago in Jackson, Mississippi, and this single event opened the door to awareness and perspectives that have challenged and molded my entire life since.

Their website states, "CCDA is a network of Christians committed to seeing people and communities holistically restored. We believe that God wants to restore us not only to right relationship with Himself but also with our own true selves, our families and our communities. Not just spiritually, but emotionally, physically, economically, and socially. Not by offering mercy

alone, but by undergirding mercy with justice." This statement is packed with meaning and I have seen these words lived out. I am encouraged to know there are Christians who talk not only about the salvation of souls, but who care about the salvation of communities. It is heartening to be part of a multi-cultural group where conversation and action revolves not around feel-good platitudes, but real justice—justice that incorporates everything from attitudes to economics. Christian Community Development is rooted in a biblically based philosophy of 8 Key Components which, when embraced, will transform the organizations and individuals who practice them.

The national conference is held annually as an opportunity for networking and training for CCDA practitioners from across the county and around the world. Each year, the host city is much more than a destination; they become an active partner in preparing and presenting the event, modeling how the components of Christian Community Development are powerful tools for community transformation and justice. Each National Conference draws over 3,000 people from around the world to share in best practices. Experts and scholars teach workshops around relevant themes. Practitioners find support by networking with others facing similar challenges. Advocates bring attention to issues affecting people at the grassroots. And provocative speakers challenge our assumptions about what it means to embody Christ's love to the poor in our communities.

In 1993, I made the trip to Jackson with my wife and our co-pastors, Nathaniel and Sherri Orr. We had recently started a small church in North Minneapolis and were feeling like no one quite understood what we knew God had called us to do. As black and white leaders working together our friends often criticized or failed to understand why we believed that living out racial unity was essential to living out our faith. While we held many of the theological beliefs of white conservatives, we clashed on our views of society, justice and politics. But in Jackson we found connection and new direction.

It was my first journey into the Deep South and it was eye opening. We would go into a restaurant, which was racially integrated as a whole, but our table was almost always the only one where black and white were eating and talking together. Our presence was not always welcomed and people made no effort to hide their feelings. It was amazing to hear the stories behind the formation of CCDA and learn that this racial hostility, multiplied exponentially in the 1960s, was the environment where CCDA principals were birthed through the life and ministry of Founder John Perkins. At the conference, through speakers, workshops, and the informal networking that ensued, we found a home. Here were people who not only understood what we were attempting to do in Minneapolis, but they had already done similar things in other cities.

I want to challenge Minneapolis and Saint Paul to REPRESENT, and be present during this year's conference September 26–29 at the Hilton Minneapolis. Some great things are happening in the Twin Cities; this will be an opportunity to show the world. Yet, this is also an opportunity for us to learn from the experience of great teachers and leaders from many backgrounds and experiences. If you are tired of conferences where everyone looks, talks, and thinks the same, if you are ready to be challenged and become a participant in a great movement, this is a home for you.

Registration is still open at ccda.org or by calling the national office at 312.733.0200.
Marque Jensen is Pastor and Current Executive Director at Minnesota Immigrant Freedom Network.