



# Divine Intervention with Help From United Way

## How Your Contributions are Changing People's Lives

For as long as Vallery Williams can remember, she's felt a spiritual connection to God. While other children were playing games or watching TV, Vallery remembers sitting alone in her family car so she could pray. Her dream was to become a preacher, but the pastor at her family church told her God didn't call girls into the ministry. He suggested she re-think her dream, so she did.

For 30 years, Vallery directed her energies toward helping people, working as a substance abuse counselor, a life skills trainer and counselor at a youth correction facility. Finally, 10 years ago, she decided to pursue her dream. Vallery received an undergraduate degree in Health Sciences and Consumer Services from Texas Southern University and then came to Kansas City to pursue a Master's of Divinity Degree from Saint Paul's School of Theology.

In order to cover the cost of tuition, Vallery knew she would have to work while attending school full-time. It wouldn't be easy, but she was determined to find a way. In Texas, she worked as an associate pastor while attending school. In Kansas City she heard about an opportunity to serve as an interim pastor for three churches in small Missouri towns up near the Iowa border. After a lot of praying and soul searching, Vallery decided it was what the Lord wanted her to do. What began as a six-month interim appointment, ended up lasting three years. Vallery would attend classes at Saint Paul's Monday through Friday and then would drive 2½ hours to lead church services in Grant City, Sheridan and Denver every Sunday morning. It was a grueling schedule, but Vallery believed it was all part of the Lord's plan.

As a full-time student and part-time pastor at three churches, Vallery was one of the 46 million Americans without health insurance. She wasn't too concerned about it until she began feeling tired and weak. At first, she tried to ignore her symptoms and treat herself with home remedies because she couldn't afford to go to the doctor. One day, however, things got so bad that Vallery could hardly stand. The staff at Saint Paul's suggested she go to Kansas City Free Health Clinic, one of a dozen local health clinics funded by United Way.

She remembers being surprised by how professional and courteous the staff was, along with the cleanliness of the clinic. Vallery says, "It was a far better experience than going to the hospital emergency room, where uninsured patients aren't always treated with the greatest respect. They took the time to listen to me and conduct tests. I felt like they really cared about me as a person." The tests revealed that Vallery was diabetic, with high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Doctors referred her to a nutritional counseling program for diabetics at Swope Health Services, which is also funded by United Way. There, Vallery learned that she needed to change her eating habits, get more exercise and follow a strict medication schedule. Counselors took the time to educate Vallery, answer her questions and calm her fears.

Without health insurance, Vallery wasn't sure she could afford the medications she needed, which cost more than \$1,000 per month, until she discovered she could get them for free through KC Free Health. Now, she watches what she eats and makes sure to take her medicine twice a day. Vallery is looking forward to graduating in May and receiving a full-time appointment, with health care benefits. For now, she thanks the Lord that United Way supports Kansas City Free Health Clinic, Swope Health Services and many other programs that help thousands of people like her who don't have health insurance. She is also thankful that people in Greater Kansas City care about their friends and neighbors and show it by supporting United Way.



Doctors at Kansas City Free Health Clinic were the ones who discovered that Vallory Williams has diabetes and high blood pressure. Although she has no health insurance, they give her the medications she needs to keep both health conditions under control.

Rev. Vallory Williams is clearly in her element as she leads worship services at Epworth-Roanoke United Methodist Church.



Rev. Williams greets members of the congregation before a recent Sunday morning worship services.