

LaVerne Stokes

You may know that LaVerne Stokes is married to Al Stokes; you may know that she is the Co-Executive Director of Sandtown Habitat. But did you know that her nickname is "Beanie?" Or that her favorite television show is *Everybody Loves Raymond*? And you had better not call her at home after 10:00 p.m!

LaVerne, born in 1952, grew up in Sandtown (1513 North Stricker Street) and has been here her entire life. As to life in Sandtown during her childhood, "It was nice; we had a really good time. There were no vacant houses. People really shared their resources with each other. On hot summer nights my daddy put our TV in the back yard and all the neighbors came out to watch shows like *Rawhide*, *Bat Masterson*, *Gunsmoke* and the *Ed Sullivan Show*." Music "was a high note for us." She and her friends often stood on the corner of Stricker and Presstman harmonizing, and they formed a group called "4 Teens" and performed soul and R&B on the streets, at clubs like the Crystal Ballroom, and at the Gilmore Homes Rec Center where they won a trophy for coming in third place in a talent contest. They were even written up in the *Afro*.

In 1998 she married Al Stokes; between them they have seven girls. She says "I married my heart's desire; the joy of my life is my husband...but after him are my seven grandchildren."

LaVerne likes cooking and baking ("when I'm not too tired"), TV shows "that make me laugh," and sweet potato pie, and she loves Patti LaBelle and city life ("seeing people mingling and knowing who my neighbors are"). She is a morning person. She dislikes "attitudes," seeing people hurt, liver, and horror films and has a fear of driving on the highway.

When asked why she is in Sandtown, LaVerne says "I love Sandtown and always have. I believe it's in God's plan for me to remain." Which is to the abundant blessing of the neighborhood: she has facilitated the rebuilding of more than 200 homes with Sandtown Habitat and serves as the Board Chair for the Learning Center. She and Al served as the capital campaign chairs for the \$5.5 million New Song Center. And, as Pastor Thurman has often said, LaVerne is a pastor with a pastor's heart, loving people whether it be by providing them with a home, visiting them in the hospital, offering an encouraging word or praying for/with them.

If you have not purchased Pastor Mark Gornik's book *To Live in Peace*, the preface which is written by LaVerne is worth the price of the book. Her story is one of deep faith in God no matter what happens, of persistence in the face of pain and struggle, of loving people from every walk of life, and of exhibiting a contagious joy and a desire for justice for every individual.

Finally, LaVerne said that if she ever did move (which of course we would never let her do), she would move to Chicago which she loves for its "being alive, its hustle and bustle!"