In the 1980s, the crack epidemic resulted in many open-air drug markets in DC. One of the largest was on Newton Street. The night of December 12, 1988, two young men involved in the drug trade were shot and killed in front of the doors of St. Stephen's Church.

Coincidentally, Parish administrator Comfort Grandi and other parishioners had planned an anti-drug vigil for four nights later. That vigil took on added importance after the killings.

But the one-time vigil didn't end the problem. Drug trafficking continued on Newton Street, in the church parking lot, and around the church. Washington Free clinic volunteers and patients were robbed after evening clinics. In April, 1989, Grandi tried again.

Therefore, beginning at 8:00pm Sunday, April 2, I will try to sit on the front steps of the church every night for as long as those young people are out there, I hope something will come too, and that eventually we can be out there 24 hours a day.

The vigil had results. Drug trafficking stopped around the church during those hours. Police paid more attention, often having an officer present at the vigil. Neighbors formed stronger bonds. In September, 1989, Grandi tried again.

The Vigil took hold. Parishioners and neighbors began gathering on the church steps every night from 8-11pm. Vivian McFarland wrote about her experience in BREAD.

The vigil had results. Drug trafficking stopped around the church during those hours. Police paid more attention, often having an officer present at the vigil. Neighbors formed stronger bonds. In September, 1989, Grandi tried again.

The Vigil soon ended. Drug trafficking continued. But, as the Post reported, the Vigil said to the dealers and our neighbors “We have faith, we’re here to stay and we care.”