

Good Samaritan Home

New Beginnings

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City vs GSH—again

In the past nine years that our reentry housing program in Greenville has been in operation, we have housed and mentored men who have committed serious, and often violent, crimes in their past. But there is no crime more offensive, and no group of offenders more punished than sex offenders. While their prison time may last only a few years, their collateral punishment in the community can last a lifetime. I know this firsthand because the majority of our residents are sex offenders.

Needless to say, our house has not been a welcome neighbor to some. In 2002, even before our first resident arrived, a group of angry neighbors presented a petition with 450 signatures to city council demanding that our house be shut down. After four months of heated debate, the council reluctantly agreed we were within zoning laws.

Then in 2008 the city declared we were a group home and ordered us to close. Thirteen months later, when issue finally came to court, the city withdrew the complaint.

There is no sliding scale of grace. In God's eyes, everyone deserves a second chance.

And now the council is planning to rezone the entire city, extending the buffer zone from 1,000 to 1,500 feet, not only shutting down our program, but banning all sex offenders from living in 90 percent of the city. **We fully expect to be in federal court for years fighting this latest round of opposition.**



Walter was convicted of robbery at 16 and spent 9 years in prison. Now he encourages teens not to make the same mistake he did.

Understand the concern

As a father of three children and the grandfather of six, I can absolutely

understand the community concern to protect our children and to punish those who violate them. But this does not justify the frenzy of fear, anger and even violence that has consumed this discussion from the beginning.

Let me be very clear. I do not defend or in any way lessen the severity of the crime these men have committed. However, I believe very strongly that everyone—including those who have committed serious crimes in their past—deserves a second chance for three reasons.

First, the law says they have paid their debt to society and are now free to rebuild their lives.

Second, we can't afford not to help them. There are 30,000 registered sex offenders in Ohio.

Helping them get a job and a stable place to live means they will become tax payers instead of tax burdens.

Third, and most important, there is no sliding scale of grace.

In God's eyes, everyone deserves a second chance.

(Further discussion of grace on page 3)

Affordable housing and support is key

For the past three years we have been working hard to provide post-shelter affordable housing for all our residents.

Leap of faith

In 2008, in the midst of our first court battle with the city, in a leap of faith, we bought a foreclosed home two blocks away. With the help of volunteers, we have been able to offer long-term support to 12 men for the past 20 months.

Radical faith

Unfortunately this house barely met the need for more affordable housing, especially for women and children. So in a radical leap of faith, we bought a nearly-condemned duplex nearby.



The bad news is that it had to be totally renovated from the basement to the roof. The good news is that all the remodeling we had to do provided jobs for our residents.



They helped us install the new roof, re-mortar the block walls and gut both apartments and install an entirely new interior.



Donated work

Needless to say, all this work meant that we had to spend a lot more money on this project than budgeted. But that's when the fellows at Korrekt Plumbing came to our rescue.



A whole crew donated a Saturday and installed an entirely new plumbing system in both apartments. They even donated

all the material! Without their help, this job would have cost us more than \$6,000—and broken our already strained budget.

When completed, this facility will help as many as 7 more people – and especially women and children - get off the street and back on their feet.

Not just that, but **this building, like all the deteriorating houses that we have renovated in this struggling part of town, has become a symbol of grace. Like our residents, they have been given a second chance,** and that makes all the time, back-breaking work and expense worth the effort.

More than housing

But we believe that programs don't change people. People change people. So we have recruited a host of volunteer mentors who are willing to commit their time, talent and compassion to help hurting people learn how to overcome the bad habits that got them in trouble in the first place.

With Ron Bonfiglio's mentoring support, Walter has been working for a year and even has his own checking account.



Grace is meant for all

At root, this nine-year, on-again, off-again conflict over our reentry program is not really about zoning, or even sex offenders. It is about grace.

The Bible is very clear again and again that the Church – all of us who call ourselves Christian – have an obligation, a divine mandate, to reduce the suffering of all those who cross our paths, regardless of what sins they may have committed.

The foundational belief in our faith is that there is no sliding scale of grace.

God loves everyone regardless of what sin they have committed. Jesus lived that every day when he walked, talked and ate with “tax collectors and sinners.” So do we.

Conditional love

However, when I asked one particularly vocal critic what he would do to help some of the people we help, especially the out-of-county residents who have nowhere else to go but our house following prison, he said, “That’s not my problem!”

But as Christians it is our problem. Helping outcast persons, regardless of what sin they may have committed—or even what county they may come from—has been the foundational Christian teaching and practice for 2,000 years.

The Church is the answer

Throughout history it has

always been only the Church that has helped those no one else was willing to help.

It was the Church that cared for the plague victims when no one else would go near them.

It was the Church that fought for child labor and education reforms when no one else cared.

It was the Church that fought to change prisons from dungeons of punishment to places of rehabilitation.

It was the Church that fought the immoral laws of slavery and segregation.

And it was the Church who cared for those dying of AIDS when everyone else was afraid to touch them.

That is because only the Church sees “the least of these” as loved by God. For if the Church does not do these acts of kindness, then the ones who need God’s love the most will never know God’s love.

No excuses

That is why we make no excuses for this ministry to even sex offenders. **It is a daily example of God’s remarkable love for even the worst of us.**

Our ministry shouts out grace with every new homeless, smelly, mentally ill person who comes into our shelter in the middle of the night, and with every man coming to our reentry house after spending 10 years locked up in a prison cell, and absolutely with every sex offender who has committed the most outrageous of offense.

If God can love and forgive these people, then he surely can love and forgive you and me.

And that is what is so offensive



about our ministry. It is not about justice—punishment. We all understand justice. It’s about grace—

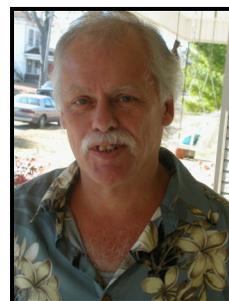
forgiveness—

and that is what seems so unfair, so maddening to some people.

But grace isn’t about fairness. It’s about unconditional love.

Worth the cost

Knowing this makes all the criticisms, no matter how vile and hurtful, all the legal conflicts, no matter how time consuming and expensive, and even all the threats to our property and our bodies, of little consequence.



“A man by the name of Zacchaeus; a chief tax collector, wanted to see who Jesus was. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to

him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner’ But Jesus said, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”



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**GOOD SAMARITAN
HOME**

Welcoming the Stranger

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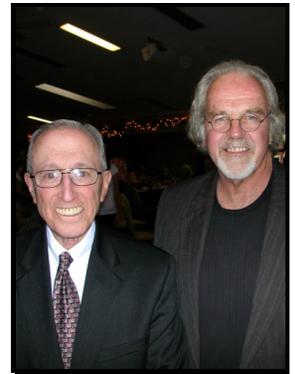
Three-County Taskforce

There are 2,300 people on parole in Miami, Darke and Shelby counties. Nearly all of them want to restart their lives, but there are too many barriers for them to overcome without help. Good Samaritan Home was picked to organize 46 different government and service agencies in the region to help address those barriers.

“Without help, too often they end up back in jail or prison, and that is something in these tough economic times, we can no longer afford,” GSH director John Graham said.

Currently 4 out of every 10 parolees go back to prison costing Ohio taxpayers \$1.7 billion a year. But with tax revenues greatly reduced, state and county officials have had to make drastic cuts in much-needed services.

This new Ex-offender Reentry Taskforce will focus on substance abuse, mental health, employment and housing. More important, volunteer mentors are being recruited to offer hands-on support to those coming home from prison. **This taskforce was formed so that local people can address local needs with local solutions.**



Federal Court Judge Walter Rice will be mentoring the new Reentry Taskforce

Housing the homeless

It’s been a tough year – especially for the poorest among us.

Needless to say, our two shelters have been full. **So far this year we have housed nearly 100 people for more than 3,500 days**, and we have had another nine people stay in our transitional apartments for as little as a month and as long as a year until they could afford their own apartment.

The toughest barrier our residents face is the economy. With unemployment locally still more than 9%, jobs are hard to find for everyone. The end result is that about 11% of the population here – and 40% of the single-parent families - live in poverty.



Cherokee and her 3 children were desperate for a place to stay this fall. She lost her house and was about to lose her job if she didn’t have housing. She stayed in our shelter for three months until she could save enough money to get her own apartment. “Staying here has helped me financially, emotionally, and in so many ways,” she said when asked by GSH staff how her family was doing.

35 tons of food for hungry

The good news is that our “Feeding America” program is

making a difference in the lives of many hungry people in Darke County. This is a cooperative effort of Second Harvest, the national pantry that provides food for us, and Wal-Mart to help feed those who are suffering.

Through this program, the Greenville Wal-Mart will have donated an estimated 70,000 lbs. of food to Good Samaritan Home by year end. In turn, **we will have donated 61,000 lbs. of that food to five other local service providers.**

These agencies include the Bradford Food Pantry, Darke County Home, Community Unity, Church of God Food Pantry, and Grace Resurrection Center Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen.