

Good Samaritan Home

# New Beginnings

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## Tale of two cities

When we first announced in 2001 that we wanted to help men coming from prison become productive members of the community – “taxpayers instead of tax burdens” we called it, we thought Greenville would see the ministry as a benefit. We were wrong.

**Over the past 12 years we have taken an inordinate amount of criticism because many of our residents are registered sex offenders – probably the most reviled class of offender possible, modern day lepers. But we believe there is no hierarchy of sin, and there is no sinner beyond God’s grace. But because of that belief, we have been maligned, reviled, ostracized, sued and even threatened on numerous occasions. So much so that during one particularly tense period we had police protection at public meetings when there were death threats directed toward us.**

This all culminated in 2010 when the Greenville City Council passed an ordinance that would ultimately shut down our ministry in the city. Although our attorneys warned the ordinance was unconstitutional – *tortious*

*interference* they called it, and would likely lead to a protracted and expensive lawsuit, the council nonetheless voted 7-0 against us.

But three years later the city rescinded the ordinance with barely a whimper of protest in council. Why? Because the city had the law firm of Pickrel, Schaeffer & Ebeling of Dayton study the ordinance and they concluded the same thing our attorneys had warned – not only was the ordinance unenforceable, but the city would very likely lose any lawsuits that were filed, and that could cost millions of dollars in damages.

“It is difficult to determine the amount of money for which the city might be liable if challenged,” city law director Camille Harlan said. “If they could show we knew the ordinance could not be enforced they could go after punitive damages. There’s no cap on civil rights damages.”

### Unintended consequence

**Although the intent of the Greenville ordinance was to close our ministry, it actually caused us to grow 12-fold!**

Instead of focusing on the “Red Sea” in front of us, we focused on the “Promised Land” of our calling, and determined to expand rather than quit. We first opened a house in Sidney and another in Dayton. But we soon realized that the need in Dayton was so great that we were constantly adding more houses to meet that need.

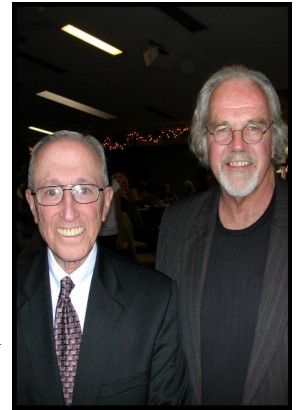
More important, Montgomery County officials welcomed our expansion with open arms.

County Commission Administrative Assistant John Theobald said there were no other reentry housing programs for the 1,500 people who are coming back to Dayton from prison every year. “We are so glad you are here!” he said.

So instead of limiting our ministry to just six men in Greenville, the actions of the Greenville council forced us to expand our vision and now we have 13 houses in three counties that can house 75 men!

What is most miraculous is that at each step of our growth, when it was always darkest, with no apparent end in sight, when we simply trusted God and followed our calling, the doors always opened, the sea always parted and the money to finance our growth was always there.

All we can say is what Joseph said to his brothers who tried to kill him. **“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”**



GSH Director  
Dr. John Graham  
with Federal Judge  
Walter Rice



Council members vote 6-1 to repeal 2010 ordinance intended to curtail GSH ministry in Greenville.

# GSH director assaulted

*Bob Robinson, Asst. Editor with the Early Bird Newspaper contributed to this article.*

On Aug. 19, there was a scuffle outside of the Darke County Courthouse that resulted in the arrest of Adam Weaver, a former resident in the Good Samaritan Home shelter, who attempted to stab GSH director Dr. John Graham with a knife.

Graham was not injured. The knife tore about a six inch slice out of Graham's jacket.

"We've been trying to get him much needed help... we've been afraid something like this might happen. And it did," Graham said,

"Actually this is a good thing," Weaver's mother said. "He's going to get the help he needs."

She added her son hadn't had a job since February. He was not taking medication for what she referred to as a "bi-polar" condition.

"He's a totally different person. I had to kick him out of my house... he put two holes in my door." She wasn't sure where her son was living; staying in his car or walking around town.

Graham and his wife Kathy were at the courthouse to testify regarding an incident where Weaver was allegedly throwing pop cans at Graham's house.

"Suddenly he just started yelling and screaming and pulled out a knife," Kathy said. "He yelled stay away from her."

Mrs. Weaver said she didn't know who pulled her son off of her... she was trying to get



*GSH director Dr. John Graham was assaulted outside the Darke County Courthouse by a knife-wielding homeless person with mental health problems who had threatened his mother.*

away from him.

"He had grabbed me and was trying to take me somewhere," she added. "I was afraid he was going to hurt me."

## **Update on this incident:**

We have known from the beginning there are inherent risks in trying to help damaged people. All the research data, and our own experience housing more than 1,000 people over the past 12 years shows that ex-offenders are not the risk, but those with mental health issues, such as this incident has shown.

Mr. Weaver was a local man, with good family and no arrest record. But as his illness intensified, so did his erratic and threatening behavior.

Although the family had repeatedly tried to get help for him, he had refused treatment.

In May he stayed in our shelter with no incident, but two months later, without warning, he damaged our property and began making increasing threats toward me.

We filed charges hoping the court could then mandate some

sort of treatment.

It was after this court hearing that he confronted me on the courthouse steps, yelling delusional threats, and in an instant had pulled out a knife and attempted to stab me.

So this begs the question, realistically Mr. Weaver will be back on the street again with no guarantee that he will not still be intent on doing me or Kathy harm.

**So what should we do to protect ourselves?** I was advised by

one concerned police official that I should **carry a gun**. But in doing so, would that change me? More important, would it change how we respond to those sick people who need us the most? So that option was ruled out.

**A retractable baton and even mace were considered**, but again, we felt this was too confrontational, and inconsistent with our core beliefs.

**In the end we determined that if we are serious about our faith, and our commitment to helping damaged people, there will always be inherent risks. But trusting God means exactly that, and returning violence for violence only breeds more violence, not healing.**

At present, Mr. Weaver is still in jail awaiting trial. This time, however, the local mental health office is actively involved and there is real hope that he will finally get the help he needs – whether he wants it or not.



# New beginning stories

**Walter** was just 16 years old when he was arrested for stealing a car. Charged as an adult, he spent the next 9 years in prison. When he came to us in 2008, he was unskilled, barely educated and very nervous about being in Greenville.

He struggled for the next several months, but it was his grandmother, with the most colorful threats that only a grandmother can get away with, who got him to stick it out.

He left us for a time, tried to make it on his own, got nowhere, then came back. In late 2009, still with no job, he was about to give up and go back to prison when we connected him with Mike Williams at the Versailles Winery who offered him a job, and Ron Bonfiglio who agreed to mentor him.

For a street kid from Washington, DC, with one-third of his life spent in prison, holding a regular job wasn't easy. But Mike and Ron persisted, and then one day, he finally got it - and his life finally started to turn around.



**That turn around was most evident on March 15 when Walter did something that no one in his family had ever done – he got married.**

“My mother and dad never married. None of my 17 brothers and sisters are married. I never really heard of marriage till I came here,” Walter said.

**Walter credits the good marriages he saw with those mentors around him. “Before I thought you lived together to help with bills. But then I saw stability in their marriages.”**

So when his relationship with Jackie Miles got serious, he determined that he was going to change his family life and marry her – and take on the responsibility of her two kids as well, Jacob, 15 and Erin, 10.



“Marriage affected my relationship with the kids,” he said. “Now they come to me about everything. They have become my first priority. So much so that I am learning something every day about these kids.”

**Jeremy** struggled for several years after coming out of prison. It wasn't until he also got a job at Versailles Winery and Mike Williams took him under his wing did his life finally start to turn around.

He too married his girlfriend Angela and started taking responsibility for their children, Damion now

8 and Kaylee now 14.

But money was always a problem and that made their marriage contentious. Their biggest expense was rent – more than \$500 a month.

Mike had been helping Jeremy get his finances in order. First it was helping him finance a dependable car, and then when that was paid off, he helped him buy a truck.

But when Mike suggested he think about buying a house, Jeremy balked. “I never owned a house before. My parents never owned a house and neither did Angela's parents,” he admitted. “I was scared to buy a house.”

But Mike worked with him for more than a year, connected him with a committed realtor and Jeremy started saving for a down payment.

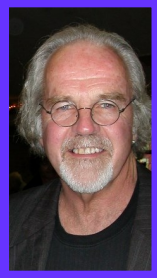
**And now they own a three-bedroom brick house for about half what they were paying for rent!**

“Having my own house reduces my stress,” Jeremy said. “As an ex-offender owning a house tells our neighbors that I'm not a bad guy. Now they treat me better.”

But more important than that, Jeremy said owning a house is the best thing he can do for his kids. “I have life insurance now, so if I die, I know the kids will always have a stable place to live, and that's something I never had.”

Jeremy credits Mike Williams for his house and his success. “There's nothing I can't talk about with him. I know he's always there for me.”





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## 2nd chance novel

Forty years ago I sat down to write a novel, but never put the first word to paper because I had nothing to say. I was too young and too inexperienced. But I never put aside that dream to write.

At first I wrote news stories for the local newspaper. Mostly boring stuff, but it taught me how to make even government news interesting. That led to a syndicated human interest column where I could have fun writing about the weird things that people say and do. I especially liked writing about the chasm that separates men and women in marriage, particularly Kathy and me. We are polar opposites and have tests to prove it! And that made for nearly 300 columns of material.

But well into my 50s I wanted to do more serious writing and enrolled in a doctoral program in theological studies and social work. That led to my first serious research book. It was a 10-year study on the positive impact that mentoring ex-offenders could have on the individual mentors and even the community. Although it was an important academic work, it was not something that would be read by the average person.

So this summer, now 65 and with a lifetime of age and experience, I returned to my first dream of writing a novel. It is a fiction book, tentatively called, **“The God of Second Chances.”** Although it tells some of the rehabilitation stories of the men we mentor, it centers on the second chance given to all of us who have come from broken families, who wrestle with damaged emotions that cause all of us to walk with what I call an “emotional limp.”

**We all need second chances. That’s the story of Good Samaritan Home and that’s the Gospel story.**

# Degree at last!

Too often we think that “those people” need who help overcoming the sins of their past are just those who have committed a serious crime and spent time in jail or prison. But all of us have some need, some shortcoming, some unhealed wound that we have to overcome.

For Residential Services Director Kathy Graham that need was her education. Kathy was brought up in an era, and especially in a family, where education was an unnecessary luxury. Especially for girls.

Worse yet, the high school nuns told her she wasn’t smart enough for college – and she believed them!

So college was never a consideration for Kathy - until she was 42 and she realized that she wanted to help other people avoid some of the mistakes she had made. She wanted to be a teacher – and that meant going to college.

It was an overwhelming experi-

ence for her, not knowing the first thing about college classes. So she had to first take remedial classes before her first real college course, which only confirmed what her high school teachers had said – that she wasn’t smart enough for college.

But she persisted, going to class earlier, studying longer and harder than all the other younger students who didn’t have all the difficulties she had. She cried most days with frustration, still convinced that the nuns were right.

That is, until she came home with her first A on a test! And that was the motivation she needed.

But too often life has a way of delaying even our best plans, and Kathy’s college degree had to be delayed again



and again. But it was the college dean who nearly derailed her dream when she told her that she was too old for the teacher program. She cried and cried over that devastating setback.

Then one day she realized that she could still be a teacher. But instead of teaching math or science to children in the classroom, she could teach life skills to men in our reentry program – men who, like Kathy, were trying to overcome a lifetime of mis-

takes and needed someone to direct them, to encourage them.

So with this renewed sense of mission, she finally finished her degree in May **WITH HONORS** – now in Social Work – after 28 years of frustration, struggle and tears.

**Kathy is clear evidence that you are never too old to get a second chance in life!**