

Good
Samaritan
Home

New Beginnings

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Why we do this

On a good day, working with ex-offenders is never an easy task. There is part in all of us that has little sympathy for those who have committed some crime—and especially a serious crime. I understand that feeling from some in the community. I agree there must be a place for accountability in civil, and especially a moral society.

But accountability is only half the issue. When a man is sentenced to five—10 or even 20 years in prison for a crime, he should pay his debt to society. But when his sentence is ended, when according to the law, he has been rehabilitated, he will be released back into the community. And the fact is that 95 percent of all the people in prison are coming home some day, and all of them are looking for a way to rebuild their broken lives.

Leaving prison not easy

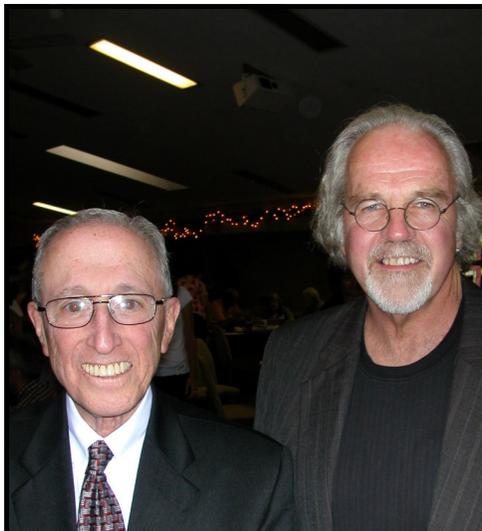
That's where you and I come in. Imagine stepping outside of a 10' x 6' cage where you have been locked up for years, and then being put out on the street the next morning and told, "Get a job and a place to live right away or we'll lock you up again!" But when you come home, you find that no one will hire you or even give you a place to live because of your past crime. Even homeless shelters are off limits to many ex-offenders.

Tax payers, not tax drainers

The natural reaction from some – perhaps even many – is that it's their own fault – which is true. But many also say, "It's not my problem!" But the truth is that the plight of these ex-offenders is our problem. If there are more than 2,000 men and women coming back to our region from prison every year, we all benefit if they are working and giving back to the community – taxpayers instead of tax drainers.

Community support

That is why Federal Judge Walter Rice and the Montgomery County Commissioners have been so supportive of our reentry housing program and



GSH Director Dr. John Graham
with Federal Judge Walter Rice

why we have been able to add – and fill – five houses in Dayton in just one year. They know the community is actually safer with programs like ours. **In fact, we have been told repeatedly by Judge Rice how glad he is that we made a commitment to the Dayton community.**

Spiritual obligation

But on a more personal level than community safety, for the Christian, do we not have a moral responsibility – even a spiritual obligation – to help those who cannot help themselves, and especially those at the bottom of society, those no one else will help or even recognize as worthy of help?

Best sermons are silent

For 12 years as a minister I studied and taught the Bible and the teachings of Jesus to my congregations. But I'll be honest with you, **I think my best sermons now are the ones where I say nothing—when I just do the teachings of Jesus** by offering a place to sleep and food to eat to a homeless, hungry and often angry man coming from prison.

And your donation is a key part of that silent sermon of God's grace that we can preach together through this ministry.

Offender to manager

We talk a lot about our houses because they are tangible. But houses are not what we really do. We are about people—giving a second chance to people who never had a second chance, those the Bible calls “the least of these.”

Mike planned to be a doctor when he enrolled in the University of Kentucky in 1984. But he got involved in drugs and dropped out of school. That choice eventually led him to prison for attempted murder for a drug deal gone bad.

Even though he only served 11 of his 50-year sentence, starting his life over has not been easy.

“My parents and my grandparents all died while I was locked up. My friends left me, and nobody would hire me coming out of prison,” he said.

Since then he has had a long



Mike discusses house needs with Kathy Graham, Housing Director.

series of temporary jobs. Finally nine month ago Mike got a part-time job at a local soup kitchen. Although it didn’t pay enough to live on, it did make him feel good helping other people who were struggling more than him. Then he heard about our program through his support group, and in June he

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’” Luke 19:8

moved into our Woodcrest house in Dayton as the resident manager.

Although it’s not always been easy living with a house full of men coming from prison, Mike said he can see that because of his prison time he can better help the men.

“They know I’ve done time and they see it as an inspiration for them, that they can make it too.”

But it takes more to get out of prison than just walking through the gate, or even getting a job on the outside. Too often prison comes with you on the outside. The anger, fear and violence that are a daily part of prison life can leave scars that can last a lifetime.

“I’m learning how to communicate with people more,” Mike admitted. *“It’s hard for me to trust people because of the abuse that happens in prison. It’s not something you let go of that easy.”*

But Mike said he is finally starting to heal, finally coming out of the prison that has been in his mind and heart since 1993.

“Knowing that I can help someone has given me a sense that I have some value, some worth, and that has allowed me to heal.”

When **Nathan** left the Marines in 1984, he had plans for college, not prison. So after studying business for two years at Edison Community College, he moved with his wife to Texas. For the next 17 years he did well there, managing her family’s business.

But after his divorce in 2001, he ended up in prison for seven years.

But his declining health made his time seem more like a death sentence. *“I had several strokes and a heart attack while in prison—and prison health care isn’t much, if anything at all.”*

So when he was released in 2011, he came back home to Sidney to be with his only remaining brother. Unfortunately, when the landlord learned of his prison record, he was kicked out of the apartment and forced to live under a bridge. That’s when the local sheriff called us to help.



“Normally I don’t get involved in these issues,” he said. *“But I found a guy down by the river who has to use a walker to get around and winter’s coming on. He’ll probably die if we don’t find a place for him.”*

We helped Nate get into the Veteran’s Administration housing in Dayton. While there he was able to get the healthcare he needed and his Social Security payments started.

Then in July he asked to come back to live with us in Sidney and be near his brother. Two months later we asked him to be our resident manager there.

“It feels good to help guys who are in the same place I was a year ago,” Nate said.

“Transitional” stories

From the beginning, our faith statement has been—what is the need in the community, and how can we help meet that need?

That is why we have expanded so much—from one house in Greenville in 2001 to 11 houses in three counties now. The need for housing and mentoring support for the poor has been so great!

Part of that need is for long-term affordable housing. And that was why, over the past three years, we have added several “transitional” houses for those who do get a job, but cannot afford an apartment of their own.

Greenville apartment

In 2009 we bought a nearly-condemned apartment building in Greenville to rehab into affordable housing for five men.



But rehabilitating houses—like rehabilitating people—often takes more time and money than we first imagined. But after three years and 50% over budget, the



Greenville building is done—and it is remarkable! A real asset to the neighborhood.

Tony is our first resident there. When his parents died 20 years ago, he tried running the family farm alone. But after a serious accident, he lost the farm and had to move into the Darke County Home.

“I spent most of my time in my room there,” he said. “Some of the people were violent and I found it easier to avoid them rather than risk assault.”

But after an altercation with another resident last June, he was forced out of the county home. With no place to go, and no one to help him, he ended up in our shelter.

Fortunately, his mental health caseworker helped him get his Social Security payments started and he was able to move into our new Greenville apartment.

“It’s great here,” he said. “It’s more of a home than I have had for the past 20 years. The county home was just a place to hang my hat. But this is the best thing since living with my parents.”

Dayton apartment

Because there were no reentry houses in Dayton, we were asked in 2011 to expand our ministry there with one house. But the need was so great that we quickly added three more houses for up to 30 men—and those houses quickly filled to capacity.

Ron came to us last December after spending 10 years in prison. He lived in our Greenville reentry house for four months, but could find no work. So we moved him to Dayton, hoping there would be more job options for him there. But he still struggled. Sometimes prison leaves invisible scars that don’t go away, and Ron struggled to keep positive.

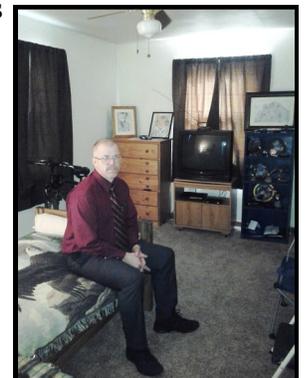
“I was depressed big time,” he admitted. “I was ready to go back to prison.”

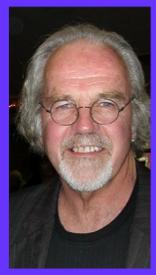
To his credit, no matter how he felt, he kept looking for work. Even though the only work he could find were just temporary day jobs, through sheer determination, he made that a full time job by showing up in the job line every day at 5am, hoping he could get some work—any work—for the day.

Some weeks he worked every day, some weeks just one or two days. But he never stopped trying.

Finally in September he was able to move into our new Dayton transitional house. Best of all, as a result of his temp job, he was just hired on as a full-time permanent employee at one of the factories where he did temp work.

“I knew something would come eventually. Now my plan is to save up to get my own place,” he said.





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**GOOD SAMARITAN
HOME**

Welcoming the Stranger

Visit our website
www.goodsamaritanhome.org

Can you help?

With so much expansion so quickly this past year, we desperately need your help furnishing these houses.

Most important, we critically need single beds and bedding.

- Temporarily we moved beds from Greenville and Sidney to Dayton because of the need there. But now we need at least a **dozen single beds**—with mattresses for all the houses.
- We give two blankets to every resident—and with four buildings for 28 more men his year, that's **56 blankets for this winter.**
- We also need **lots of single beds sheets**—both fitted and flat.

Appliances are a real need as well.

- Our residents have no money for a laundromat, so we provide a washer and dryer for each house. But with so much growth, we desperately needs electric dryers, and **especially washers.**
- Electric stoves, refrigerators, and most of all, **freezers,** are a priority. Feeding 57 men every day takes a lot of appliances.
- Even basic kitchen items like dishes, silverware , glasses, and **particularly pots and pans.**

All sorts of furniture items—especially dressers.

Keeping on, in spite of...

Probably the hardest thing we at Good Samaritan Home, and all our mentors, have to deal with is the failure on any level of the men we help. That's because we all want the best for them. We all want them to make it, to overcome their past mistakes, to find grace and healing. To find peace.

And I sincerely believe they want those things as well. But overcoming past mistakes, finding grace, healing and peace is no easy task.

Yes, grace is freely given by God. But it is not freely given to one another. And too often we do not offer grace to ourselves. Too often the sins of our past, the scars of our own abuse and the abuse we have inflicted on others, is too great a burden to simply leave behind with a prayer.

Healing in fits and starts

We have known from the beginning of this ministry that healing comes in fits and starts, that rehabilitation is a process, and that not everyone will accept the grace we give them. But this lesson came home hard this year.

Rob was one of our best residents for the 90 days he was with us. When he was not looking for a job, he was doing community service with Kathy.

After just a few weeks, he did get a job, and was doing well there. He even had a promotion.

But sometimes, if you are not always on guard, the old life can pull you back. We lost contact with Rob after he moved out of our reentry house, but we heard on the street that he was hanging with the wrong people, and partying too much. But every time we would see him and ask about the rumors, he would always say he was fine. *"I can handle it."*

Then one day we heard he was found dead in his bathroom. A drug overdose.

I know this is only one loss out of all the 235 men we have housed and helped over the past five years. Intellectually we know we are not responsible for the actions of our residents—especially when they leave us. But we still take each loss personally, and we still lay awake at night asking God what more could we have done?

Yes, this ministry is often frustrating. And yes, we do get discouraged. **But we will still keep on offering food and shelter and support to all those who come to us for help. We will do that because that is what we were asked to do – to offer God's grace through acts of acceptance for those who have never seen or felt God's grace, even when they don't accept it.**