

THE PRODIGAL'S PATH

A Message from Union Gospel Mission
Director Jason Christensen



No Need to Wait

The word **Advent** derives from the Latin *adventus* which means “to arrive.” It is also the season in the liturgical calendar preceding Christmas where we wait upon the arrival of the Savior of the World. During this time of waiting, there are a host of lovely Advent traditions such as the lighting of candles with an Advent wreath or preparing an empty manger for Jesus with a Nativity set.

But what if we chose not to wait?

When I consider the work of Union Gospel Mission, I'm drawn to Matthew 25:40 **“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’**”

Jesus Christ is *already* among us...and He is found among those in need.

As UGM readies for the Christmas season, we invite you to join us in preparing for His arrival in the here and now. What exactly does that look like? We can find Him if we simply:

Seek out the lonely, in their isolation....

Seek out the hungry, in their time of want....

Seek out the addict, in their struggle against temptation....

Seek out the houseless, in their need for shelter and warmth....

Seek out the lost, in their desire to find community....

Thank you all for your support of Union Gospel Mission. Wishing you and yours a blessed Advent and Christmas.

Grateful to serve,

Jason Christensen

***About the Title:** In Henri Nouwen's seminal work, *The Return of The Prodigal Son*, the author explores how we experience seasons in our lives where we identify with each of the three characters in the famous parable found in the Gospel of Luke (15: 11-32). I plan to use this space to help others understand the importance of identifying with the poor and being in solidarity with those whom society has shunned. It's my prayer that when we see the beggar on the street we won't look at them through the eyes of the judgmental older brother, but through the eyes and compassionate heart of the loving father.



Winter Needs at UGM

Experiencing homelessness is never easy, but the winter months can be especially miserable—even life threatening! Our team continues to reach out to our neighbors in downtown Portland and all over the city with our Search + Rescue van.

Items we currently need are:

- * Blankets
- * Coats
- * Gloves
- * Hats
- * Hand warmers
- * Bottled water
- * Travel size hygiene items (toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner)

For Women's LifeChange:

- * Children's toys (new and unopened)
- * Baby care items, wipes, diapers, and pull-ups
- * Twin bed sheets, comforters, and new pillows

Donations can be dropped off at 3 NW Third Avenue in Portland or purchased through our Amazon Wishlist: <https://a.co/3UxbMMD>

Thank you for your partnership and generosity!

LIFECHANGE LETTER

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UNION GOSPEL MISSION

LIFECHANGE LETTER

Feeding the hungry, restoring the addict and loving our neighbor since 1927. CHRISTMAS 2021



Lawrence's Story:

From Taker to Giver

After losing his father at the age of four, Lawrence turned to drugs to help cope with his losses. He started smoking pot and drinking alcohol in the 2nd grade. By the 8th grade he turned to meth. Fighting loneliness with his mom away at work, Lawrence and his brother turned to the local gangs to fill the role of family.

By 18 he had already spent time in prison. After his release, he tried pulling his life together and was trying to do the right thing, but soon he fell right back into the same crowd and back into addiction. *“I had no sense of direction, nothing to look forward to except getting that next fix...getting high,”* he said.

In the spring of 2020, Lawrence's mother was in the first wave of mortalities of COVID-19. *“When my mother died in my arms, my whole world crumbled,”* explains Lawrence. Soon after his mother's death, Lawrence relapsed. After three months back in addiction, he decided it was time for a change. He talked with his best friend from Hermiston who was in UGM's LifeChange for Women and Their Children and decided to give the program a try.

Continues inside...

INSIDE

Volunteer Profile: Barry Dictson

No Need to Wait

Winter Needs at Union Gospel Mission

From Taker to Giver Continued from front...

Now, after being in the LifeChange program for over a year, things are looking up for Lawrence. “Things are good now. I’m healing, I have good men in my life, I’ve been baptized. I now have the main thing that I’ve been missing all those years . . . Jesus!”

As part of LifeChange work therapy, Lawrence has

“I now have the main thing that I’ve been missing all those years . . . Jesus!”

been going out several nights a week serving our neighbors in need in the metro area through UGM’s Search + Rescue outreach.

“While in LifeChange, I found something that I’m very good at, and that’s working with the homeless,” smiles Lawrence. “In my addiction, I was a selfish man. Now, I’m a giver.”



“To our donors, I can say, that not a bit of your money is wasted. I’ve seen people broken, hurt, and scared, who go on to having purpose and not being afraid anymore.”

UGM’s LifeChange is a Christ-centered recovery program where residents live and work in a community committed to transforming their lives and breaking the grip of addiction. LifeChange consists of counseling, work therapy, discipleship and transitional after care, at no cost to the resident.

If you know of someone battling addiction or homelessness and they have had enough and are interested in a LifeChange, contact our Intake Coordinator at mensintake@ugmportland.org or 503-274-4483.

UGM VOLUNTEER PROFILE: Search + Rescue’s Barry Dictson

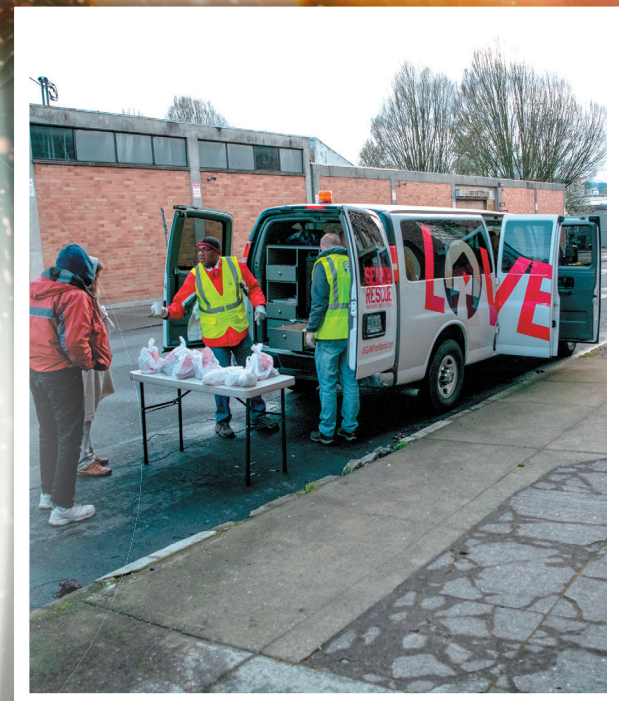
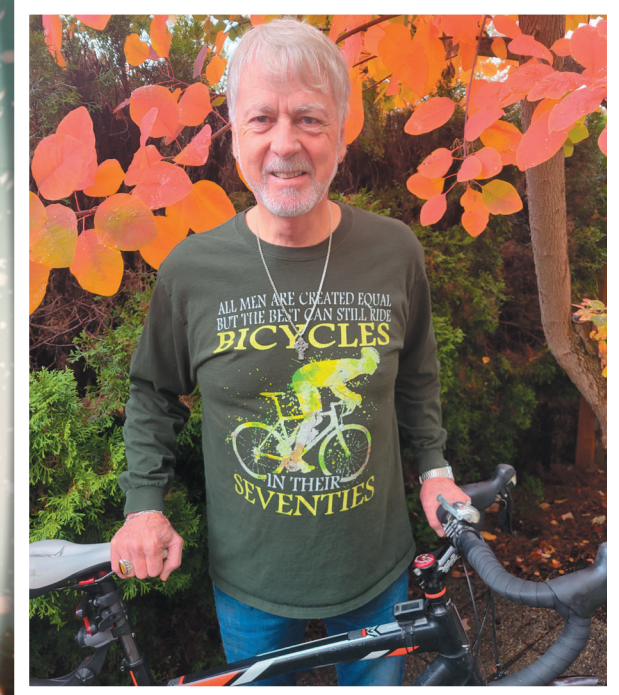
“If you’ve never served people living on the street, expect to be surprised by new and different perspectives once you engage with them and hear their stories,” says UGM volunteer Barry Dictson, who’s worked primarily with Search + Rescue doing outreach for nearly four years.

“My favorite parts are listening to people’s stories, praying with and for people, and ultimately shining the light of hope and Jesus into the lives of those who have lost sight of what hope means.”

An outdoor enthusiast who enjoys spending free time with his grandchildren, Barry started volunteering with UGM shortly after retiring from a career in finance.

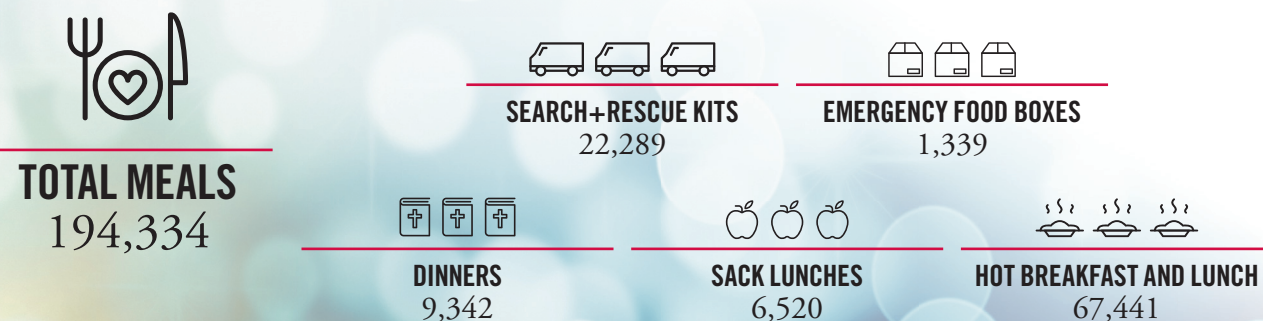
“A friend who volunteered with UGM thought I’d be a perfect fit with Search + Rescue because of my passion for social justice and interest in helping marginalized people,” Barry explains. “I’d always felt called to help others when the occasion arose; but it wasn’t until I was older that I felt called to do more. The Apostle John said, ‘Dear friends, since God loved us, we surely ought to love each other. Such love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear.’ People living outside are sometimes scary...but once you know their name and love them, the fear goes away.”

Working with UGM’s compassionate staff has also been inspirational to Barry, who adds: “The men and women in LifeChange are truly being spiritually fed and taught to pay the grace and mercy received at UGM forward to their neighbors on the street. I love being a small part of that.”



For more information on volunteer opportunities, please call 503-274-4483 or go to ugmportland.org/volunteer

UGM BY THE NUMBERS: OCTOBER 2020 – SEPTEMBER 2021



“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Matthew 25:35-36

CHRISTMAS 2021