

THE PRODIGAL'S PATH

A Message from Union Gospel Mission
Director Jason Christensen



First Things First

When the wine ran out at a certain wedding held in Cana, Mary turned to her son and told him he needed to do something. “Why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come,” replied Jesus (John 2: 4). Mary was having none of this and advised the servants to do as her son instructed. And with that nudge from his mother, Jesus performed his first miracle. His hour had come.

While Jesus was the reluctant miracle-maker at the wedding in Cana, he was much more intentional when it came to launching his public ministry: The Sermon on the Mount.

That Jesus chose the Beatitudes as his first Messianic message says so much about his priorities and with whom he chose to identify: The poor, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted in his name (Matthew 5: 1-10). These were the bedraggled, the outcasts, the “unimportant” by society’s standards.

How do we treat today’s outcast...the homeless person, the drug addict, the sex worker? Are we willing to extend love and grace to them the way Jesus did? The work of Union Gospel Mission is to do exactly that: Make real the love of Jesus.

Thank you to all who support our ministry of loving on the outcast and bringing the Good News to the poor. If you are seeking ways to deepen your faith journey and identify more with Jesus, check out our Lenten series, “*Encountering Jesus In The Least Among Us*” on Facebook @UGMPortland and Instagram @ugmpdx and consider volunteering with us at the Mission.

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.



Volunteer Spotlight: Tom

Tom volunteers his time helping in the kitchen at LifeChange for Women and Their Children. He enjoys watching the women and children thrive in their new environment. “This is such a huge victory of the Kingdom,” said Tom.

While helping serve the Christmas meal in 2019, Tom and his wife made a connection with one of our homeless guests, and he was impressed with the work that is being accomplished at the Mission. “UGM is a shining light for Christ in the story of Portland,” said Tom. “That’s why I volunteer here.”

Tom explains, “I would encourage someone thinking of volunteering to just do it. It is so amazing that God would choose to use us even in our brokenness. The best way to reflect the glory of God is to live the words of Jesus, that you love one another, as I have loved you...”

Are you looking for ways to share the gifts God gave you? If so, please call 503-274-4483 or visit us online at ugmportland.org/volunteer to get involved.

LIFECHANGE LETTER

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UNION GOSPEL MISSION

LIFECHANGE LETTER

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

APRIL 2022

SALEENA'S STORY: *I'm so grateful for this place*

A victim of domestic violence for almost five years, Saleena endured bouts of emotional and mental abuse from her husband. Most of the abuse was in the form of jealousy and his substance addiction. Then in front of their four kids he turned violent.

“Before coming to UGM, I wrongly thought that

domestic violence didn't include emotional and mental abuse,” said Saleena. Often Domestic abuse starts as jealousy or threats, followed by apologizing and promising to change, but then the cycle happens again...and again. With Saleena it happened over and over until it turned horribly violent.

“I thought I was going to die that day,” she says. *“His addiction got worse and worse and I tried to hold on for the kids, but soon I realized I needed to leave for the kids and myself.”*

Saleena’s church family and pastor guided her to call the Union Gospel Mission.

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“I know now what love truly is.” — SALEENA

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"I've never had a substance addiction, why should I go to a recovery program, I thought to myself. But in the middle of the night while I was crying myself to sleep, in a tent on the streets, with my four children by my feet because I had nowhere else to go...I said okay, I'll give it a try. Coming to UGM's LifeChange for Women and Their Children was an instant relief. They didn't judge me, they encouraged me.

"Being able to get counseling and go to recovery classes is huge to me. I'm healing not only from the abusive relationship, but from childhood hurts. I'm learning what domestic abuse and codependency is. I'm getting a lot closer with my kids, they are learning how to express their feelings in a healthy way. They know that they don't need to be scared here."

Saleena is hopeful for her future now for the first time in a long while.

"I'm looking forward to healing and being confident and healthy," she says. "I know that I'm loved here, I know now what love truly is, not like in the past. I feel loved here, not just hearing it, but feeling what love truly is, and my kids feel it too. I'm truly grateful for God leading me to this place."

UGM's LifeChange is a Christ-centered recovery program where residents live and work in a community of people 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 a woman battling addiction, homelessness, or domestic abuse and she is interested in a life change, contact LifeChange for Women and Their Children at 503-802-2271.

The Journey Home Campaign



The Journey Home Campaign was launched in January 2021 to build a new center for homeless women and children in our community. Over the past 15 months we've remained on schedule to break ground this summer. As we anticipate this vision becoming a reality, here are a few quick facts about the new facility:

- **Total Square Footage:** 50,500
- **Location:** NW 185th and Rock Creek
- **Rooms:** 52 (110% increase from our current facility)
- **Impact:** 2,000 women and children over the next decade
- **Transformational Spaces for Women and Children:** Chapel, Learning Center, Counseling Center, Quiet Rooms, Community Spaces, Kitchen and Dining, Children's Education Center, State-of-the-Art Playground
- **Groundbreaking:** June 2022

For more information on the Journey Home Campaign, please contact Ron Smicker at 971-533-4678 or email rons@ugmportland.org

In Memorium

We are sad to share the passing of our beloved co-worker and friend Kathy Barnes. Kathy came to UGM six years ago as a resident. A year later she graduated LifeChange and served as a Resident Assistant. She recently moved into the position of shelter manager. If you visited LifeChange for Women and Their Children during the past five years there is a good chance you were greeted by Kathy.

Women's LifeChange Director Johnni had known Kathy for more than 20 years. "People were often intimidated by Kathy, but once you really looked at her you saw she exuded love," says Johnni. "She was filled with love and acceptance. It didn't matter where you were in life she would accept you and love you and walk alongside you. Most importantly, she always wanted to please God."

We are sure that when Kathy was welcomed into the arms of her savior she heard, "Well done, good and faithful servant."



UGM BY THE NUMBERS: OCTOBER 2021-FEBRUARY 2022



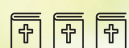
TOTAL MEALS
84,367



SEARCH+RESCUE KITS
7,857



EMERGENCY FOOD BOXES
914



DINNERS
3,355



SACK LUNCHES
2,560



HOT BREAKFAST AND LUNCH
24,192