

Star Gospel Mission

Fall 2009

The Newsletter of the Star Gospel Mission, Charleston, South Carolina

Shining brightly since 1904



STAR GOSPEL MISSION

474 Meeting Street
Charleston, SC 29403

The Rev. William K. Christian
Executive Director
Tel. 843-722-0980



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Looking for a hand up, not a hand out

Based on an interview conducted by Pastor Christian with a former resident, Bryan Sessions.

Christian: Bryan, what brought you to the Star Gospel Mission? Sessions: In a word, hope brought me here. I'd just turned 40, had just been released from prison, and I was lost. I could have gone home to Mom and Dad, but I had pride and worth and decided it was time for me to become the man that I was supposed to be. So, on Sept 9, 2008, I knocked on your door at the Star Gospel Mission. Lots of guys come to SGM for a hand out but I was there asking for a hand up.

What do you mean by a hand up? I wanted to learn more about who Jesus Christ was and how He was starting to work in my life. I couldn't understand it and I wanted to make Him the focal point of my life and begin to learn some new life skills, like how to be a productive citizen, how to budget money, how to deal with my mental disability (bi-polar type 1), how to be responsible, how to get up and go to work everyday and enjoy what I do. These are all skills that my parents instilled in me, yet somewhere along the line I forgot them. I felt that with hard work and dedication I could learn these skills and apply them to my

everyday life.

Tell me a little about your past and how you came to this realization. It began when I stopped taking my medications. Each time I stopped I ended up in prison. I've been in prison 7 times for the same crime, writing bad checks. Part of being bipolar and not taking my medication meant that I needed some-



Bryan Sessions

thing to soothe the depression. I would go to the store and write checks for whatever I wanted, with no limits. For me, it was always, I'm not out of money until I'm out of checks. Because I knew the consequences of what I was doing I would then get more depressed. I knew what was going to happen. I knew that I was going to get locked up. That's how I was incarcerated

7 times over a 20 year period. 16 out of 40 years of my life have been behind bars.

When did all of this start? Actually, it all started when I was 14 years old living in a military family in Saratoga Springs, NY. When my father was transferred to a base in Charleston, my mother told me that he was not my real father and that my last name was not Sessions. My real father had divorced my mother and was living in Ohio. I even went to visit him, but returned to Charleston to live with my mother and step father. When I was 21 I started writing bad checks and began running from the police. I went to visit my father for a second time. While I was there, we got into a bad argument, he took out a pistol, a 44 magnum, and shot me in the leg. Following two surgeries I went back to South Carolina.

Since then Bryan and his mother and step father have resolved their differences. Through the grace of God, their relationship has been restored.

I asked Bryan if he had ever forgiven his real father for shooting him. He said: I forgave my father for shooting me the day he died. I even went to Ohio for his funeral; it was a real experience. He was the Chapter
Please see Sessions, page 4



Left to Right: Matthew Crooks (Mission Cook/Custodian), Gap Employees: Julia Booher, Sheena Olson, Sarah Wolf, Julia Hall (Gap Manager), Pastor Christian. The Gap employees collected 7 large boxes of gently used jeans, tee shirts and tops for distribution through SGM.



Choir from Berea Baptist Church, Greer, SC.



First Baptist Church Youth Choir, Rhonda, NC.



Dinner prepared by members of St. Stephen's Choir. Six home-made dinners served at SGM annually.

What is the Star Gospel Mission?

The Star Gospel Mission is now entering into its 106th year of operation, predating all other Christian welfare organizations in the Port City. For over a century it has been a landmark beacon to men who, for a myriad of reasons, find themselves without a place they can call home. The Mission provides up to 25 homeless men with a clean, safe, comfortable environment, within a Christian atmosphere, where they can experience a new beginning, a fresh start and a new lease on life.

Quite often people mistake the Star Gospel Mission for Crisis Ministry, a facility which is only three blocks away from the Mission. To make the distinction, Crisis Ministry is a shelter that houses men, women and children on an overnight basis. The Star Gospel Mission is a transitional housing facility, where men reside up to an entire year. It costs nothing to stay at Crisis Ministry. At the Star Gospel our residents pay \$90.00 per week.

Always remember that:

THE PRIMARY BENEFICIARY OF THE GIFT IS THE GIVER.

Please join us in keeping the ministry of the Star Gospel Mission thriving by sending your tax deductible contributions in the envelope enclosed.

Our actual cost to house a man for one week at the Mission is \$195.00. With \$90.00 paid by each resident, the balance, \$105.00, comes from individuals, churches, grants, foundations, civic organizations and businesses. We receive no federal or state funds whatsoever.

All of our residents are either currently employed or receive a veteran's pension or a disability check. Men of all ethnic backgrounds, faiths and walks of life reside at the Mission.

We provide a structured community where residents can begin to adopt improved moral and ethical principles for living a more wholesome, fulfilling life. We attempt to help our residents adopt the **A.B.C.A.S.** standard, meaning that they begin to work on improving their **Actions, Behavior, Conduct, Attitudes and Speech**. In psychological terms that's referred to as: **systematic behavioral modification**. Without making some rather significant changes in their lives, personal growth and improvement will not occur. To assist our men with this endeavor, we provide individual counseling for drug, alcohol and other addictive behaviors, family and marital difficulties and past criminal records. We do not admit registered sex offenders because of the obvious liability concerns.

Several other interesting facts you might wish to know about the Mission are

that we offer an interdenominational worship service every Sunday morning and encourage all of our residents to attend. We provide job placement counseling to assist men in finding gainful employment. We collect and distribute clothing to residents and other needy persons throughout the community. Through the generosity of the Good Cheer Fund, each fall we distribute over a thousand \$50.00 gift cards to needy people throughout the community.

The sheer fact that the Star Gospel Mission is still in existence after 105 years of doing the ministry we do for the homeless men in Charleston, says that what we are doing is highly effective. Over that period of time, we have helped thousands of men make life-transforming changes; changes that have enabled them to become independent, productive citizens within our community. With your continued faithful and generous support our future promises to be a bright one.

Yours faithfully,

The Rev. William Christian

There's nothing we can do to make God love us any more than He already does and nothing we can do to make Him love us any less!

Shining Brightly for 105 years

In memory of the Rev. Victor Morgan Dukes

September 28, 1930 – May 2, 2009

In this newsletter we mark the passing of the Rev. Victor Morgan Dukes of Maggie Valley, NC, Superintendent of the Star Gospel Mission from 1990-1996. Rev. Dukes was called home to be with the Lord on May 2. He was born in St. George, SC on September 28, 1930. He graduated from Mars Hill College, Furman University and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and was ordained in Charleston, SC on August 21, 1955 by the Ashley River Baptist Church.

During the course of his ministry, Rev. Dukes pastored several churches in South Carolina, Maryland, and Washington, DC. From 1958-1965 he served as the Director of Religious Activities at Furman University. From

1976-1985 he served as the Coordinator of Resources for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and



Morgan Dukes.
Photo by Bill Jordan.
Courtesy Post and Courier.

was the Director of General Services for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State in Washington, DC.

Rev. Duke's last call to professional ministry was at the Star Gospel Mission. Dukes assumed the position of Superintendent under the direction of J. Douglas Donehue, then Executive Director, shortly after Hurricane Hugo had dealt an almost fatal blow to the Mission. Although Hugo had all but destroyed the Mission, under Doug Donehue's capable leadership, that of Rev. Dukes, and a dedicated Board of Director's, the Mission was able to rise from the devastation and rebuild. Dukes said that he "hoped to restore the

Mission to its original purpose, which was preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ to all its residents." The News and Courier, March 13, 1990.

Rev. Duke's touched many lives with the Gospel of Christ's love during his six years at the Mission. His impact on the residents, upon the community, and all whom he served was quite profound. It is with grateful hearts to God that we can say: "well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Rev. Dukes is survived by his wife of 58 years, Marie Dempsey Dukes; one daughter, Vicki Dubuke and her husband Larry; and one son, David, and his wife Ana.

Thanks to those who provide regular support

- Grace Episcopal Church
- John Wesley United Methodist Church
- St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
- The French Huguenot Church
- First Scots Presbyterian Church
- St. Michael's Episcopal Church
- Second Presbyterian Church
- St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
- Bethel United Methodist Church
- Congregation Beth Elohim
- The Seacoast Church
- Holy Communion Episcopal Church
- St. Johannes Lutheran Church
- Trinity United Methodist Church
- The Verhagen Foundation
- The Coastal Carolina Foundation
- The Exchange Club of Charleston
- The Saul Alexander Fund
- Good Cheer Fund of The Post and Courier
- Piggly Wiggly Carolina
- Ashley Hall School
- High Cotton Restaurant

A Prayer for the Homeless

*Oh God, when in Jesus
You walked this earth
You had no place to call
Your own, no place to
lay your head. As we
stand by the homeless
and support those who
struggle alongside them,
may we stand by You,
seeing Your face and
image there.*

Barbara Vellacott



SGM residents.



Volunteers who helped with the Good Cheer Fund gift card giveaway.



Star Gospel Mission

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Over a Century of Christian Service to Charleston



Pastor Christian directing the line for people to receive their Good Cheer Fund gift cards.

All things work together for good to those who love God.

Current Mission Needs
Men's clothing, pillows, twin size sheets and pillow cases, towels and washcloths, paper towels, toilet paper, napkins, meats and canned vegetables, cleaning supplies, toiletries, light bulbs.

Sessions, (cont. from Page 1).

President of the Outlaws, a biker gang that were rivals with the Hells Angels. Even though he was dead, I thought that my saying I was sorry would bring closure to me, which it did.

When did your life of crime come to an end? On April 5th, 2008, my 41st birthday, I said enough is enough! I was in Dorchester County jail. I got up, I looked at myself in the mirror, and for a good two hours I just stood there. At that moment I felt peace. I literally felt God touch me and say to me, you're going to be OK. I got tired of being alone. I don't have to be alone anymore because I know He's there. Beginning that day it was a gradual movement toward God. It didn't happen overnight, it's been an on-going experience. I felt Jesus was just knocking on the door of my heart, but I didn't know if I had enough guts to answer the door, because I

knew that I had to surrender all.

What did that turn around look like? I got out of prison in September of 2008 with no money, no clothes, and no worldly belongings. My parents paid for the first two weeks rent at the Mission. I found a job on a construction site. Right now I'm in training to be an assistant Superintendent for KBR Construction Company. Over the past year I've purchased a used truck, moved out of the Mission, rented an apartment, left the apartment to rent a house, and just bought a new truck.

Where do you hope this amazing journey will take you? I want to give back what was given to me. I have higher goals; I can feel that God is wanting me to help people, but He just hasn't made it crystal clear as to what

He wants me to do. He keeps telling me the same thing, to have patience. I'm waiting for God's plan for my life to unfold. Whatever it is, it's going to be to serve God.

Bryan, if you had to summarize your goals, what would they be? I have three clear goals: to let Jesus shine through me; to prove to myself that I am somebody; and to show my Mom and Dad that I'm a changed man, one they can be proud of!

Is there anything else you'd like to say? I want the men at the Mission to say, if Bryan can do it, so can I. What I would really like in life is for one person to say, he made a difference in my life, then I will feel as though my life was well lived!