



Hearken House Ministry

Lending a hand ...
Not a hand out.

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Hearken House Ministry is a not for profit 501(3)(c) entity, fulfilling a need in our community and the commands of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to forgive, nurture and love our brethren. As such, all donations are welcome.

We believe that all people have worth, and deserve a second chance. To that end, we offer those less fortunate a safe place to live, grow, and be nurtured in a Christian atmosphere of love and brotherhood. We offer devotional times, Bible study, and fellowship from our community of Church fellows in order to build a strong foundation of faith for those under our care.

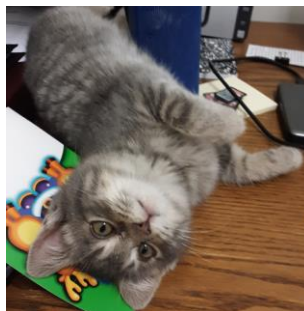
NEWS

Christmas has come and gone, and with it the hustle and bustle of the season. What remains is the joy given to each and every one of us who has accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Celebrations at Hearken House were subdued, as each of our residents reflected on the past year and what the Lord had given to them. Our blessings are endless and the Presence of the Lord manifest. By God's grace we are free of the shackles of sin, though too often the enemy lays trials and temptation before us. Whether it be Parole mandated stipulations keeping us from our families, losing a loved one, or past relationships coming home to roost, each person finds that seeking the Lord daily for strength, wisdom, and discernment is necessary. Our fellowship time together bolsters our faith in God and in our Christian brothers.

Recently, we welcomed Mike D.'s completion of our program and his moving on to his own residence! His time here was filled with growth and love, as he came to depend more and more on our Lord. His burden has been lifted as he pursues his new life free from the addictions that kept him in sin. Gainfully employed, growing in God, he is an example of the redeeming power of Christ and the love found at Hearken House. We pray he continues his walk with Jesus while sharing his testimony with those around him. We miss his presence, but celebrate his completion of the program. He shares his thoughts on Hearken House later in the newsletter.

Our newest resident is a bit of an animal. He came to us as a gift from Drew's family, and has made himself right at home. Welcome Mr. Sadie! (See the later piece "Why Hearken House?")



REQUESTS

As we begin the next round of selecting and installing residents, we find that our requirements for supplies are growing. To that end, we are looking for sponsors to assist those coming out of correctional facilities feel welcome while supplying their basic needs. We envision a core group of sponsors who can craft a short welcome letter to be given to each new disciple as they arrive in a 'care pack' consisting of a few of the following items:

- Bar soaps
- Disposable razors & shaving cream
- Shampoo
- Deodorant
- Toothbrush & toothpaste –or– denture cleaning products
- Dental floss
- Hand / body lotion
- Nail clippers
- Wash cloth & bath towel
- Comb / hair brush
- Gift cards to local shops (Sheetz, Rutters, WalMart, Target, Giant, etc.)

Unfortunately, those coming out of prison rarely come with more than the clothes on their back and a willingness to rejoin society. Being supplied with the basic necessities from loving members of the community will help their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. If you are moved by the Spirit to participate, please contact Patrick at patrick@hearkenhouse.org for further information.

PRAYER REQUESTS

While gifts and donations are always welcome, there is one thing we here at Hearken House desire and require beyond everything else – your prayers. With the support of our fellow believers, we can survive – but by your prayers and the helping of the Holy Spirit, we can thrive! Please keep each of our residents and board members in prayer. We all know that the enemy rejoices when one of us stumbles, and hence will lay traps before us all. Keeping us surrounded in prayer helps to thwart his plans and draws God nigh to each of us. When your prayers go up, the Lord sends down His blessings and grace not only on we here, but on you and yours as well. Some of the residents need specific prayer in the following areas:

Troy – Settlement of hearings and that Parole allows reunification with his family.

Drew – Parole allowing reunification with his wife and family; and wisdom as he begins the steps to start a ministry, and to find the funding needed.

Mike – Peace and comfort for he and his family, as they deal with the loss of a dearly beloved family member.

Patrick – For the Spirit to be with him as he envisions the next phase his ministry, to guide his steps.

The Board Members – For wisdom, guidance, and discernment as they lead and counsel Hearken House.

WHY HEARKEN HOUSE? The Struggles of Reintegration

We are asked from time to time why we felt led to start a home for those coming out of prison, where the love of Christ is shared. Unfortunately, ex-cons – especially sex offenders – are thought of as a bit less than worthy of the milk of human kindness. Everyone has troubles in this life, for Jesus states that quite plainly in John 16:33; but those troubles, those struggles that returning prisoners face are more challenging than the majority of society realizes. Let us provide a few examples:

Due to conditions of their parole, Troy and Drew (indeed, any offender) are not permitted to have contact with the victim of their crime. So far, so good – this makes total sense. However – they are also prohibited from having contact with the victim's FAMILY. In their case, this prevents them from seeing or speaking with those who would offer them the most support, love, and nurturing; that would help ensure them a successful reintegration into society – their wives, and children. The process of reversing the Parole Board's 'mandated' conditions are unclear. They have tried speaking with their Parole Officer, with their court ordered therapist, with friends, with family, and with the Parole Board – to no avail. Drew contacted the Board, who told him to contact his Officer. The Officer stated he could not approve visitation, as only the Board could do so.. a Catch 22. In limbo, they are adrift in the

sea of bureaucracy as their spouses attempt to keep bills paid, homes maintained, children under keep, and Faith upheld without the counsel of their husbands.

Ironically, the Parole Board's web site states:

"For you to be successful when you leave prison, it is important that you maintain connections to your family" (paragraph 5).
(<https://www.pbpp.pa.gov/Understanding%20Parole/offendersfams/Pages/default.aspx>).

Speaking of Faith, we would be remiss if we did not discuss the issues of worship. Due to the Megan's Law and Parole Board stipulations preventing all sex offenders from having contact with minors (which, by the way, prevents Michael from seeing his own son!), all offenders (to our knowledge) re-entering society are prohibited from attending church services of a mixed congregation of adults and children. This can be permitted after attending therapy, and then both the therapist and Parole Officer must agree the offender is not a threat; there must be a submission of approved 'safety' and 'event' plans to both the therapist and Officer; then contact and approval of the lead Pastor of the church they wish to attend is secured. There is no blanket approval, as it is only granted on a church by church basis. To date, Drew is the only one who has received approval to attend worship at his chosen church. Unfortunately, he still will not be attending. Why?

Because his wife attends the same church, and since he cannot have contact with her... he declines on attending and depriving his spouse of her worship time. "Couldn't he attend another church?" you may ask. Of course he could (after going through the entire approval process again), but is it not better for a husband and wife to attend together? You be the judge. Again, the above referenced passage from Parole's website continues "*,and/or religious or community organizations that are willing to assist parolees with reentry into the community.*"

What other things do we see as ex-offenders? Little things one may never see nor think of on the 'outside'. As one example. there was a store in town (we'll leave it un-named) that had an adult cat from a local shelter that was in need of adoption. The people at the store (affiliated with the shelter) asked Patrick to adopt the cat. He asked Drew to fill out the adoption paperwork, knowing that Drew is an animal lover, which he did. Time went by with no response. Patrick went back to the store and inquired about the status of the adoption. After much run around and excuses, such as them not being able to do a background check on all five members of the half-way house, the true reason for Drew being rejected as a suitable adopter came to light – they would not approve the adoption because there are sex offenders in the household.

Can you imagine how low this brought Drew, when members of society said he wasn't good enough to raise a pet?

Then there is the SORNA law requirement. Once referred to as what most of society is familiar with -"Megan's Law" - it requires those convicted of sex offenses to register with authorities periodically. This can range from monthly to quarterly to yearly, and for a time from 15 years to the rest of the offender's life. On top of this, as mentioned, all offenders must attend mandatory therapy – starting with weekly group sessions (until and if the therapist decides the offender can attend less frequently) for the duration of their parole. Sexually Violent Predators must attend once per month for the remainder of their lives. All must submit to mandatory polygraph tests as determined by their crime. Failure to adhere to these rules will land the offender back in jail for a minimum of two years.

We should also mention just a few of the standard rules placed upon all those on parole:

- No alcohol (or drug) consumption
- No frequenting establishments that serve alcohol
- No leaving an established 'parole area' without advanced written approval from the Parole Officer
- Obtaining employment or signing up for WorkForce Development, checking in daily, and attend meetings weekly, until employment is found.

- A curfew in effect from 9pm until 6am, unless at work.

Given these mandates, is it any wonder that many who come out of prison feel they were better off behind bars, where they could at least call their wives and children, and have visits? Why this disparity between the Department of Corrections and Parole?

Most of society would say “who cares? They committed a crime, and are getting what they deserve.”

Our questions then, are these:

Have they not paid for their crime by being incarcerated? Have their families not paid enough, as well? For a nation founded on Christian principles, what happened to mercy and forgiveness? This is why we do what we do. Given the lack of love, the lack of housing opportunities, the lack of support, and the feeling of being unwanted, how could we turn away our brothers? The support and commitment of the Plain community in the surrounding area, those loving and caring brothers and sisters, who see these men for the children of God that they are and who show them the face of Christ, make Hearken House the place of love and hope that it is today.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, 45, NIV)

OUR FIRST GRADUATE!

As mentioned earlier, Mike has completed the requirements of Hearken House and has moved into his own place. We asked him to share a few thoughts about his stay here. We thank him for doing so, and for the blessing that he was – and continues to be – to all of us here.

I was the first person to be accepted into Hearken House. When I arrived there I didn't know what to expect. Pat and I started with daily devotions from the very first day, and kept at it, as it seemed to help us reach out to Christ. After three weeks Troy arrived, putting a new spin on how we interacted. The devotions continued.

As Christ started working in my heart, my thoughts of going back to my old ways changed drastically. I didn't want to be that person any longer, as I put off the old man. After being there for 102 days, I felt it was time for me to move to the next phase of my journey. With Pat's blessing, having completed all that was expected of me, I moved out on my own.

Today, after eleven months, I am still clean and sober. I have been employed by the same company and have been promoted to shop lead. My walk with Christ has grown stronger. It's only by HIS power and the Holy Spirit that I continue to live a great Christian life.

Thank you Pat and the other men at Hearken House for your help and support. Drew, Mike, and Troy - you played a big part, one that allowed me to deal with issues in a way I never thought possible.