

THE PRODIGAL'S PATH

A Message from Union Gospel Mission
Executive Director Jason Christensen



You, Lord, Took Up My Case.

Earlier this year the Tri-County Point-in-Time count of homelessness was conducted and the numbers confirmed our suspicions: The population of those experiencing homelessness increased by over 2,500 people (up from 4,100+ to 6,600+) since 2019.*

In light of this, UGM is responding in two meaningful ways: First, we will continue our 20+ year tradition of “**Operation Overcoat.**” Collection sites will receive new/gently used coats and boots to distribute to the homeless during the cold weather season. Last year over 900 houseless neighbors received backpacks filled with necessary clothing items!

Second, we broke ground on a new facility for women and children. It was the vision of Director Emeritus, Bill Russell, to take the Women’s Lifechange program from an aging, limited building with capacity for 15 women and 20 children to a new facility with 52 rooms, doubling our capacity to serve 80 women and children.

Lifechange and Homeless Services are more than pulling people out of the vortex of violence, poverty, and substance abuse providing a safe space; we speak into hearts and create **room for redemption.**

UGM is blessed to have dedicated and talented staff ministering to our neighbors in need, but we must acknowledge the transformative impact is due to the provision and love of the Father and His son, Jesus.

When I see redemption realized, I’m reminded of God’s promise to the people of Israel: “*I called on your name, Lord, from the depths of my pit. You heard my plea: ‘Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.’ You came near when I called you and you said, ‘Do not fear.’ You, Lord, took up my case; you redeemed my life. Lord, you have seen the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause!*” (Lam. 3: 55-59)

Here at UGM, we take up the case of God’s people in need; we invite you to join us in our worthwhile cause.

Thank you all for your support,

Jason Christensen

*Source: Joint Office on Homeless Services



THE JOURNEY HOME

The campaign to build a center for homeless women and children



The Journey Home Campaign

This June, Union Gospel Mission broke ground on a new center for homeless women and children. The LifeChange community for Women and Their Children has been residing in a leased property since 2013 and has outgrown the building due to the high demand for services.

The Journey Home project will construct a new 53,457 square foot building in northwest Portland that will expand this type of programming to a larger number of women and children. This new building will double our capacity to serve more than 2,000 women and children in the next decade as they work to end cycles of addiction, poverty, and abuse.

Not only will the new facility provide 52 rooms to accommodate women and children, but will also be equipped with incredible spaces for healing and transformation. The new center will include spaces for community building, onsite counseling, parenting classes, a children’s education center, chapel, and more!

We plan to open the new home in 2023. The cost of this project is \$17.8M to build and furnish. To date UGM has raised just over \$14M and with your help, we can reach our goal.

Would you consider a special gift to help us finish this new home for women and children? Our community has been so generous to help us get this far.

LIFECHANGE LETTER

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UNION GOSPEL MISSION

LIFECHANGE LETTER

Feeding the hungry, restoring the addict and loving our neighbors

AUGUST 2022

Christopher’s Story

After moving from a small town to the big city, Christopher searched for ways to fit in with his new environment.

He started drinking and using drugs at the age of 17. Eventually, his mother caught him using meth in their home. Instead of punishing Christopher, his mother asked if she could partake with him.

“*Doing drugs became a family thing. It’s just something we did,*” he said.

After a few years of drug use, Chris found himself in prison. When he was released from prison, Christopher could not afford rent, so he decided to live in a tent. He spent many days worrying about how he was going to eat. He had no place to shower or other means to stay clean.

“*I would sneak into people’s yards to use their water hose to wash off. It was miserable out there,*” he said.

When Chris thought all hope was lost, the Search + Rescue team arrived with food and hygiene supplies, which were exactly the items that he needed.

This was the first interaction with UGM that Chris would have, but not the last.

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Christopher's Story

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In the winter of 2022, Chris's father came to visit him for the first time in 20 years. When his father arrived, he was intoxicated.

His father told him "I don't want to die not knowing my kids." Chris responded with a request: if his dad got into rehab, Christopher would give him a chance.

Later that evening his father passed away in a snowstorm.

"I blamed myself for the death of my father," he said.

After his father passed, Christopher began to spiral and became suicidal. "One day I took a bunch of medication, and decided I didn't want to live anymore," he said. After recovering from his overdose, the Mission accepted him into their care.

When Christopher arrived at UGM he felt overwhelmingly accepted by the men in the program,

something he had never felt before. He no longer lives in fear, worrying about what he's going to eat, or where he's going to sleep. He finally feels like he can focus on his recovery. He has hope for his future.

Christopher says being at the Mission has changed the way he thinks about God. "The impact that the bible has on the men around me is evidence that there really is a God; there's no other explanation."

Now Christopher serves on the Search + Rescue team, influencing the lives of many others as the Mission once did for him.

"This place is a godsend... it saved my life, there is no other way to say that."

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

Operation Overcoat A FIRST STEP TO A CHANGED LIFE

Operation Overcoat is our annual campaign to make sure our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness have the resources they need to survive the winter. Right now, the weather is warm and sunny, but in a few short months the cold and rain will set in. Starting in mid-September UGM will distribute backpacks with winter gear and a meal downtown, on our Search + Rescue mobile outreach, and at partner locations with churches and organizations in the metro area.

Our goal this year is to provide 600 people with a backpack. The backpacks are filled with warm clothing, blankets and hygiene items.

Please partner with us to spread the love of Jesus and make this our best Operation Overcoat ever!

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

- 1. Organize a donation drive at your church, workplace, or school.** Our most needed items include pants, new undergarments, sleeping bags, boots, and coats. Drop your items off at Union Gospel Mission at 3 NW Third Avenue by August 31st.
- 2. Support Operation Overcoat financially.** It costs about \$29 to serve each person through Operation Overcoat. Consider a special financial gift for Operation Overcoat. You can give online at ugmportland.org.
- 3. Volunteer.** Help us prepare items for distribution and pack the backpacks; for more information visit www.ugmportland.org/volunteer

Thanks for partnering with us to help people move off the streets and experience a changed life!

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Steve

Steve started volunteering with the Union Gospel Mission in 2016. He was one of the first members of the Search + Rescue team.

Steve says, "The Search + Rescue outreach looks different from when it started."

Originally, the team would go out on prayer walks to connect with the homeless community and ask if they needed prayer while providing food and other

items. They eventually obtained a few vehicles, which expanded their ability to reach more people in need.

"The reason I love volunteering with Search + Rescue is because of the ability to talk about Jesus Christ," Steve said.

Over the years, Steve has seen a growing need for prayer in the community.

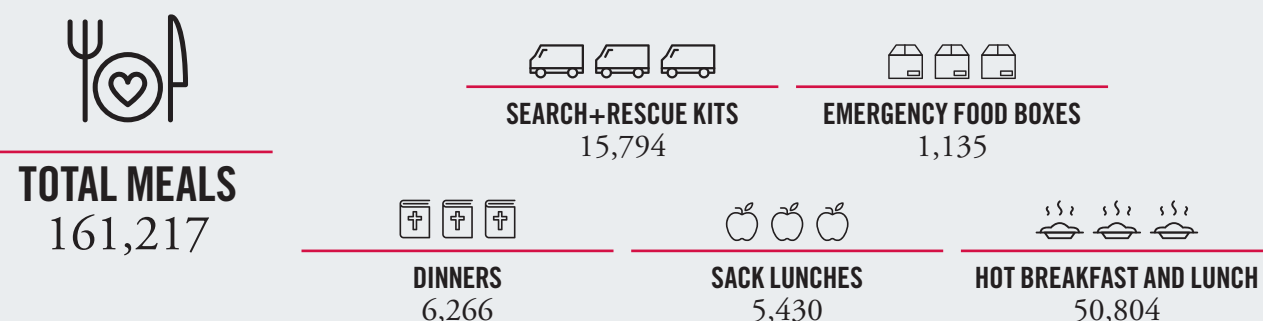
"Whether they believe in Christ or not, almost every individual is open to the idea of prayer. This is what sets Search + Rescue apart from the other outreaches I've been part of," explains Steve.

He also loves to watch when individuals who UGM encounters through S+R become LifeChange residents. Oftentimes, these individuals eventually work their way into a leadership role and serve on Search + Rescue themselves.

"It is such an amazing thing to witness God's hand in these men's lives and the transformation that happens as a result. I love having the opportunity to be a part of that; that is why I volunteer."



UGM BY THE NUMBERS: OCTOBER 2021 – JUNE 2022



"Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon." Isaiah 58:10

AUGUST 2022