

THE PRODIGAL'S PATH

A Message from Union Gospel Mission
Executive Director Jason Christensen



Our God is With Us

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel which means, God with us.” Matthew 1:23

Imagine a God who loved us so much, He came to live among us. Not only did He come to live among us, He entered this world by the most humble means. It could be even said by impoverished means.

Which explains Immanuel's earthly ministry, where preference was given to the poor and marginalized.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us consider how God is with those in need today and presents us with opportunity to share His love and care.

Consider Duke, as featured in this newsletter. Duke suffered abuse at the hands of his adoptive parents, fell into addiction which landed him in jail, and would be left to live on the streets. *Immanuel* was with Duke – and through Doug and Katie – to bring him to Union Gospel Mission where he would find recovery, restoration, and redemption.

Immanuel is with volunteers like Curtis who bring love and light to the homeless camps.

Immanuel is with our supporters who supplied 600 backpacks for Operation Overcoat.

Immanuel is with the hundreds of women living or about to be living on the streets who will enter the doors of our new Women's LifeChange facility next December.

On behalf of the UGM staff, volunteers, and those we serve, allow me to say “Thank you” for your support and for being Immanuel, God with us.

Christmas blessings to you and yours,

Jason Christensen



THE JOURNEY HOME

The campaign to build a center for homeless women and children



The Journey Home

Union Gospel Mission's LifeChange Program for Women and Their Children is building a new facility to meet the growing need in Portland. One-third of the homeless population are families with children. The effects of homelessness on children range from a loss of education, high levels of behavioral problems and increased risk of serious health problems.

This new facility will be over 50,000 square feet and have 52 residential rooms enabling us to double bed space. It will allow us to provide increased counseling, education, meals and other essential services for homeless women and children. The new center will include a Learning Center, Day Care and Play Area, Counseling Center, a Commercial Kitchen and Dining Room.

This project is more than a building, it's a home. With this new facility, over 200 women and children a year will have a home that offers life restoration. This is a place where mom and her kids can live, grow, and heal together.

For more updates about The Journey Home, please visit our website at ugmportland.org/journeyhome

LIFECHANGE LETTER

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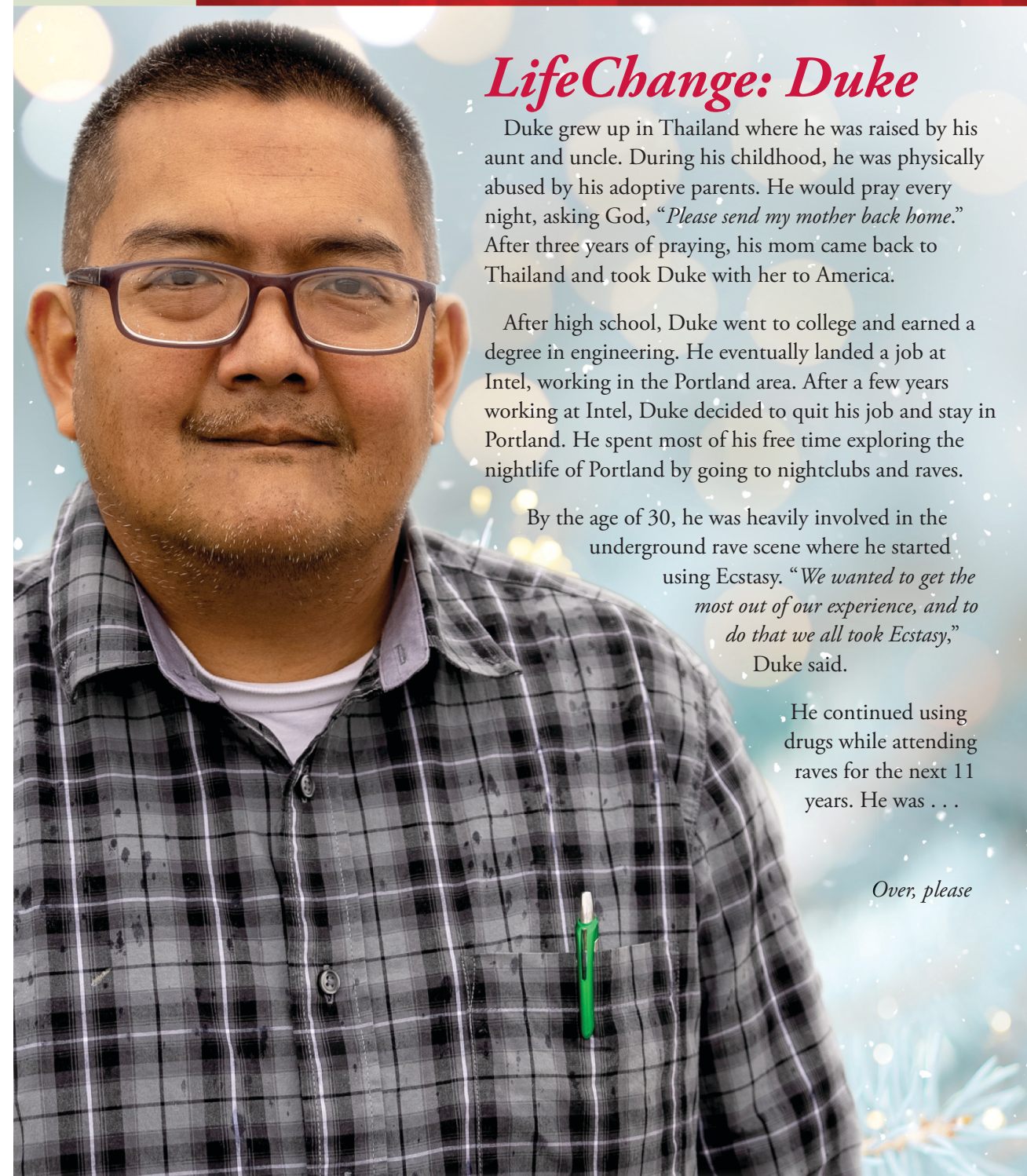


UNION GOSPEL MISSION

LIFECHANGE LETTER

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

DECEMBER 2022



LifeChange: Duke

Duke grew up in Thailand where he was raised by his aunt and uncle. During his childhood, he was physically abused by his adoptive parents. He would pray every night, asking God, “Please send my mother back home.” After three years of praying, his mom came back to Thailand and took Duke with her to America.

After high school, Duke went to college and earned a degree in engineering. He eventually landed a job at Intel, working in the Portland area. After a few years working at Intel, Duke decided to quit his job and stay in Portland. He spent most of his free time exploring the nightlife of Portland by going to nightclubs and raves.

By the age of 30, he was heavily involved in the underground rave scene where he started using Ecstasy. “We wanted to get the most out of our experience, and to do that we all took Ecstasy,” Duke said.

He continued using drugs while attending raves for the next 11 years. He was . . .

Over, please

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LifeChange: Duke Continued . . .

. . . charged with possession, a felony in Oregon at the time, and went to jail.

After spending time in jail, he decided to turn from his current lifestyle and stop using drugs. However, due to the charges Duke had, it became difficult for him to find a job. He was unable to pay rent and was evicted from his apartment. When looking for a new place to stay, many places would not accept him due to his eviction record. Having nowhere to turn to, Duke found himself on the streets.

He found a local store that allowed him to sleep there during the evenings. He didn't have a tent so instead he slept curled up near the side of the building under an awning. "Luckily, I had a heavy-duty sleeping bag. Without it, I would have froze," Duke explains.

During his time on the streets, Duke heard God say to him, "Duke, you're not going to overcome homelessness on your own. You will need the help of my people." One day, two people visited Duke, gave him a gift card, and asked if he needed help finding a place to stay. "Their names were Doug and Katie. I will forever remember them because they changed my life and brought me to Union Gospel Mission," Duke recalls.

Duke has been taking classes on mental health and communication. He has a heart to help others. He plays a major role at UGM by assisting the staff with any medical needs that residents have. He is learning how to communicate better by taking classes in de-escalation and conflict resolution.

Duke is set to graduate in January 2023. UGM is currently working with the courts to have his felony expunged so that he can return to work after graduation.

"This program has changed my life for the better," he says. "I learned what it means to be a Christian, not just to be a believer. I always believed in God, but now I can live the life He created me for."

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



Thank You for Making Operation Overcoat Possible!



A big thank you to everyone who made donations to our Operation Overcoat Campaign and to the volunteers who helped sort and pack the backpacks.

One of the best things about Operation Overcoat is our partners. Many of the 600 backpacks we distributed this year were given out

through church partners. By partnering with local churches, we can have an even greater impact.

One partner recently shared, "This year seemed incredibly timed. It turned extremely cold and wet just after our community friends received the backpacks full of supplies for cold and wet weather. It was so wonderful to see a houseless friend receive a warm coat he truly needed, and another receive a warm pair of boots. Thank you to UGM and UGM Donors for making this event possible. It makes a difference to so many!"

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Curtis

Curtis has been volunteering at Union Gospel Mission since 2015. Over the last seven years he has worn many hats. From managing security detail for special events to making breakfast. "I gained the title: Egg and Cheese Man," he said. What Curtis loves most about volunteering is the opportunity to talk with the guests and learn who they are on a more personal level. By listening to their stories, he's able to identify areas where the Mission can help them navigate through the struggles they are facing.



When Curtis first started volunteering at UGM he knew God was calling him to serve but he was still unsure about it. He understands the fear that can come with stepping out of your comfort zone. He wants to encourage anyone who may have doubts or fears, to try it for a short period of time and see how it feels. He can confirm that most of the fears you have aren't warranted, and the things you hear or read about don't occur.

"The people we serve WANT US! They appreciate us. There has not been a single moment in which I regret serving. Volunteering is a blessing. It doesn't cost anything. All it takes is an individual willing to talk and listen to people. If you can do that, then you can serve at UGM."

Christmas at Union Gospel Mission

The holidays can be very hard for those who are homeless, and Christmas is no exception. At UGM our doors will be open Christmas day to invite our neighbors experiencing homelessness to a Christmas meal with ham and all the fixings that go alongside it.

Our dining room will be decorated to help spread Christmas cheer to those in need. Our guests are welcome to join us in the dining room for a delicious meal served by our staff and team of dedicated volunteers. Opening our doors on Christmas Day provides a place for each guest to get warm, enjoy a meal, and fellowship as we celebrate the holiday.

UGM BY THE NUMBERS: OCTOBER 2021 – SEPTEMBER 2022



TOTAL MEALS
214,742



SEARCH+RESCUE KITS
23,245



EMERGENCY FOOD BOXES
1,135



DINNERS
8,544



SACK LUNCHES
8,040



HOT BREAKFAST AND LUNCH
68,650