

Grace Mission – Gala talk 2016

I just recently finished a book, "God's Dream for You" by Matthew Barnett, pastor and leader of the Dream Center in California, and he had some very poignant thoughts and I want to share several of them with you. He begins...

"Human need is often God's call to action."

At Grace Mission we uncover opportunities to serve by placing ourselves in a position to let our hearts be broken. Purposeful ministry starts with people in need, someone who has a vision for how to meet that need, and enough faith to take a step in that direction. God-given purpose always arises out of need.

Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement in the 50's and 60's, had a simple idea about the poor and homeless: We – me, you, everyone – should take care of them. She believed that if everyone cared for the poor, their problems – and many of ours – would be solved. She saw a need and began "the house of hospitality" which sheltered and fed the poor in NYC.

Rev'ds Michael and Sterling Henderson saw that need 20 years ago and stepped out in faith and Grace Mission began...Within, my soon to be 6 years at Grace Mission, I am also seeing a need...

We saw a need at Springfield Apts/Joe Louis – a need to help the children within that large city housing community to excel, grow and learn through an academic educational program which, one day, will help them break the chain of poverty within their families. In the fall we will begin our 4th year of our After School program in Springfield Apts. with over 50% of our children on the A/B honor roll – but we are

seeing another need – a Youth program working with the same children that attended our After School program but who have now “aged out” of our program. Within the news, our community we hear of the vulnerability of Middle-School youth – especially disadvantaged minority youth and the many perils and trials they face growing up – we are seeing a need and casting a vision for an inner city youth program but one that is already grounded in relationship, faith, care and compassion.

We saw a need at the same large city housing community to help bring nutritious wholesome food to the people that live there. One Campaign was the result of seeing people in need. Now 3 years into the ministry of the mobile food truck, soon to start our 4th year, we are looking for new ways to end the food dessert which exists in Frenchtown. We see the need, we see the poverty, we see the hunger – the latest statistic is that 1 in 4 children in Leon County go hungry. That’s a statistic I would like to eliminate. We are casting a vision for a not-for-profit grocery store or a very large community driven food pantry in Frenchtown; in addition, to possibly having more not-for-profit mobile food trucks out within this community.

We saw a need for clean and gently worn clothing to be given to those in need – each month we have a clothing closet and give away **free** clothes along with \$10.00 Goodwill vouchers – we are casting a vision to expand the clothing closet and possibly open a **free** clothing giveaway for children as well.

We saw a need to reduce our carbon footprint and several years ago began a new recycling program. We also partnered with Sustainable Tallahassee and replaced our old gas water heater with a new on-demand hot water heater, as well as, having all of our lights within our building retro-fitted for energy efficiency. We began an organic garden. We began walking the neighborhood once a month and picking up trash while we asked if we could pray for those that we met along our way. Now in our 5th year – we walk each month encouraging good stewardship to those that join us on the walks. We are casting a vision to launch a possible recycling business and provide opportunities for employment and hands-on learning skills through an entrepreneurial mentoring program while continuing to teach about good stewardship.

We saw a need for a small health clinic - Grace Mission offers free health assessments once a quarter but we are casting a vision to expand our health clinic and we will begin partnering with the FSU medical school in the fall. In addition to the expansion of our free health clinic we see a need for a medical recovery room so we are casting a vision to open a one room/one bed recovery room. We cast a vision to provide free legal aid and advice to help those in need and we will begin partnering with the Legal Aid Foundation in the fall.

Sometimes we pray and pray and pray about finding a way to meet a particular need or solve a specific problem when the truth is, we are the solution! God has called us to be a blessing to others – love them, heal them, help them, and serve them. And that is what we always try to do at Grace Mission.

Bishop Howard quoted Pope Francis in a recent Diocesan Magazine which summarizes the diocesan mission:

“Christ performed the greatest service of all, reaching out to you and me from the cross in an embrace in love, so you and I are to respond to that love in service”

Each day, as a worshipping community grounded in the Gospel and as one of the Outreach Missions of the Diocese of Florida, we are responding to the love of Christ by sharing that love to others at Grace Mission. In particular, we are caring for the “least of these” in our midst – the poor, weak, vulnerable, elderly, homeless, addicts and children. But its only Jesus that can take prostitutes, alcoholics, thieves, and emaciated drug addicts – only Jesus can take victims of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and violence and transform them into hopeful, tenderhearted, clear-eyed men and women who are dreaming fresh dreams for themselves and their families.

I believe that Jesus allowed people to belong before they believed – then as they walked with him they began to believe. They didn’t have to clean up their lives first – two disciples didn’t believe until after the resurrection when Jesus directly confronted them and said, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25). He didn’t justify their lack of belief or make excuses for their behavior while they were learning, but allowed them to belong in order to believe.

And then maybe – sooner or later – as men and women see Christ and His followers up close, they realize that God Himself has a dream for their lives.

Belonging encourages believing. I see this time and time again at Grace Mission - as a *Ministry of Presence* we allow everyone to belong before they believe.

Mother Teresa once said, "We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. But the poverty of being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for is the greatest poverty."

By extending love, care and compassion to everyone that comes to Grace Mission they begin to embrace a spirit of belonging and acceptance. They begin to trust and trust leads to listening and listening leads to believing and believing leads to positive change. Dreams can once again be dreamed and hope begins to be restored in their lives.

God won't always give you a vision of the finish line but He will always give you a vision of your next step. I believe that God has given Grace Mission its next steps – we hope to take those steps with you, moving us one step closer in fulfilling God's dream for help, healing and hope within the City of Tallahassee.