



BEATING THE ODDS

*New Transitional Home for Released Offenders
Gives Women a Fighting Chance.*

On the third Sunday of every month, I have the privilege of taking a ministry team into the women's prison here in Decatur. In fact, April will mark our seventh anniversary. Please notice I intentionally chose the word privilege. That's because every time we provide a worship service for the ladies at the Decatur Correctional Center we feel much more blessed than we believe we have been a blessing to them. Anyone who has ever participated with us has left awestruck by the experience.

The ladies are so hungry to hear God's Word, to sing praises to His name, and long to have someone pray with them and for them. It's not unusual for them to be lined up six to ten deep at each of the five to seven prayer partners on our team. They ask us to pray with them about their families, their children, their faith walk, and a plethora of others concerns. Over the past seven years, two prayer requests surface more than all the others combined; a prayer for strength and a prayer they may not return to prison.

Recently I met a young lady through a series of God-led circumstances. I had volunteered to help Jim Helton of Release Through Jesus Prison Ministry (see our August, 2010 issue) promote their annual fund raising banquet. A meeting was held on a Saturday morning so we could discuss the myriad of details that goes into such an endeavor. A group of about ten of us gathered and we introduced ourselves to one another.

Across the table from me sat a young lady who at first glance appeared to be a bit shy and timid. (I soon discovered otherwise.) She introduced herself as Angela Corrigan with "Greater is He Ministry." Because of LIVING Christian magazine, I tend to know the majority of the ministry efforts in the area but I was not aware of Angela's ministry or what they did.

After the meeting we had the chance to visit for a few minutes and the pieces began to fall into place. Angela had began working with Jim Helton's ministry after she heard him speak at their church. His message touched her heart and the plans God had started laying years earlier began to take shape. I asked if she would be willing to share her story and the much needed ministry she has begun. Of course, I said we could meet at Starbuck's, my "official" field office.

“Back when I was in Junior High, I think I was thirteen, I was praying about what I was supposed to do with my life and in college. I always did well in school so my focus was always on the future. Social work came to my mind and at that time I didn’t even know what that was. I knew what psychology was, but I didn’t know what social work was. In high school I explored other areas but I just kept coming back to social work.

I went to college for social work and I worked in shelters as part of my internship experiences and my employment experiences. I always thought I would have a shelter for teenagers. My husband and I were living in St. Louis when this came about. We found out we were expecting and it was earlier than we had planned. We thought it was very expensive to have a child in St. Louis so we decided to move back home where our family is and that’s how I got back to Decatur.

Since we moved back here, I got to stay at home with my daughter and I thought, “Okay, now is the perfect time. If God is going to use me, He got me here, He’s made me available, what is there?” Then Jim (Helton) came and spoke at our church about Release Through Jesus and the need there was for a women’s home because there weren’t any in this area.

So I started looking into that. I spoke to some people about it and they said south of Interstate 80 there wasn’t much for women at all. I discovered Decatur is on the top ten list of where offenders go when they’re released from prison and so there’s obviously a big need but there’s nothing out there to help them. So I jumped on board and said I wanted to help out.

After a couple of months, Jim and I decided it would be best if the ministry was a separate organization. He is still helping me a lot with various contacts at the prisons and is a real blessing. But now the ministry is its own 501(c)3, and is a stand-alone effort. That was February of 2009.”

Angela’s professionalism and her Master’s Degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois are evident. She offered some statistics from some of the latest research conducted about offenders and the current prison system.

“When inmates are released from prison, statistics show 75% of them will return. This is a staggering probability, and it shows that current methods of release & re-entry need to be re-examined. This is where faith comes into play. When prisoners commit their life to God, and MAINTAIN that faith for a year after release, that statistic is turned on it’s head --- 80% will successfully alter their lifestyle and avoid returning to prison.”

Equipped only with her degree and her commitment to do what God has laid on her heart, Angela recently found a benefactor who provided funding to purchase a home where released women will be housed. (They were closing on the house a couple of days after this interview.)

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"It was really interesting how all this came about. I was praying about how and where I could find a house for the ministry. I found one that had been recently refurbished by NWRAPS (Near Westside Restoration and Preservation Society). There was also another house that looked promising. They both felt okay, but I couldn't see any reason to move on one or the other. So I prayed and prayed and prayed about it. Then one day at church I was on the praise team and I was back behind the curtain and I was praying about this. I got this overwhelming, 'It's Crea Street, it's Crea Street, it's Crea Street.' So I went out and I told my mom I finally have an answer! Then she said at the same time God was telling her it was time to move! So we're like, 'Okay, we're going to do this!'

A week later the deal fell through and I thought, 'This doesn't make sense to me. I'm sure God told me this is it.' So after moping around for about a week, I thought it was time to get online again and start looking. I noticed a house that had just been listed, no pictures, three houses down from the one on Crea Street.

It was the same price, bigger, more adequate for our needs, and we put in an offer. The seller was going to counter offer. She had been through the Great Banquet, a ministry of our church. When she learned why I was buying the house she didn't even want to counter offer, she just wanted to be a part of this. It was this huge God moment.

The same thing happened with our house mother. She said the Lord was telling her something was going to come and a friend of hers forwarded the post I had put up about the position. We got in contact with one another and it's just another one of those things that confirms this is where God wants me to be right now."

Angela explained that Greater is He Ministry will supply for the basic needs of women on parole: food, shelter, clothing, grooming items, and safety. With these provisions, the women won't have to resort to crime to meet their basic needs. Also, knowing that various unknown people have come together to donate their resources and time to give these women a second chance helps affirm their worth as children of God and human beings.

Beyond the needs of the body, the ministry will provide for needs of the soul. Angela says the ministry will provide individual and group Bible studies to strengthen their faith and relationship with God, a mentor for personal reflection and growth, require membership to a local church, and teach them new life skills to cope with whatever issues the world may bring.

As the women participate, grow and mature in God, and orient to their new lifestyle, they will move through various levels of independence within the program.

Angela explains, "The transitional home itself is referred to as The N.E.S.T. - a Nurturing Environment for a Successful Transition. The N.E.S.T. is designed to provide the ladies with a new way of living, thinking, and behaving that should prevent their return to prison. Each woman housed



Great is He Ministry's the N.E.S.T. is set to officially open May 1st.

in Decatur women's prison carries a cost to the state (taxpayers) of \$38,000 a year, and we hope to put a stop to the revolving door.

The women who will be provided services are referrals from prison chaplains, wardens, and current prison ministry programs. Since the women are current participants in the Bible studies and services provided in prison, they are aware of The N.E.S.T.'s programs, faith-based and Biblical focus, and are committed to making spiritual changes. Our housemother is coming on staff May 1st, when we will be opening our doors for residents."

Once the house is fully operational the ministry will require about \$3,000.00 per month to operate. After the ladies who are clients acquire a job, they will share in paying their expenses but most of the budget will need to be funded through donations and benefactors.

A fund-raiser to benefit both Release Through Jesus Prison Ministry and Angela's Greater is He Ministry will be held on May 13th at the Grand Palace on the campus of Heartland Community Church. There will be a dinner, music, and a speaker who was an inmate on death row for 7 years, wrongfully convicted, and was set free. While on death row, she started a ministry in prison and has an amazing testimony. You can call 217-855-7799 for more information or to order tickets. Table sponsorships are available and encouraged. (Please see our Events & Happenings on page 27.)

The N.E.S.T. will host an Open House in June once the home is painted, filled with furniture, and settled. If you would like to volunteer or make a donation, you can visit www.greaterishewomenshome.org.

Angela beams as she concludes, "Things are progressing and God is putting me in contact with the right people at the right times. How amazing it is to see Him orchestrate every movement of this process!"



Elizabeth Hallihan Pharm. D.



Wole Adeoye R.Ph.

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