

Motivated by God's Love

A young couple's own experience with drugs and prison—and the life-saving witness of God's people—leads them to offer housing, healing, and hope to others.

RICK LUND



Joseph Ottley can quickly rattle off the plethora of transgressions that landed him in prison for more than seven years.

But he will also look you in the eye and tell you his harshest sentence came from within—he was a prisoner of his own anger and self-hatred. “What really landed me in prison was a hole in my soul,” he says. “A need to be recognized. A need to be affirmed. A need to be loved.”

Ottley eventually turned his back on a life of drug addiction and gang activity. For the first time in his life, he experienced the deep, unconditional love of Jesus Christ. Not only would that life-changing love fill the void in his soul, it would spur him to reach out to other men who have experienced similar pain.

Joe and his wife, Carmin, also a recovering drug addict, now lead a prospering nonprofit ministry in Yelm, Washington, called Truly Motivated Transitional Living. Crossroads Community Covenant Church in Yelm, where the Ottleys attend, helped launch TMTL, which offers affordable clean and sober housing to men in recovery from drug and alcohol addictions.

The men who come to TMTL are broken people and, in Carmin’s words, desperate “to be loved on.”

“We know from experience that there’s nothing else like that—to be loved just as you are,” she says. “We are well aware that unconditional love being poured out on you is life changing.”

“It’s not us doing the loving. It’s just God working through us. I would like to say I can love those guys on my own all the time. But I can’t. That’s God’s work. We have to be willing and open to let him do his work.”

Joe and Carmin know all about God’s work from the inside out. They are living testimonies to that.

Joe was well into his twenties before he allowed God to change him. He had a turbulent childhood growing up in

Sacramento, California. A man in the neighborhood abused him. His father was an abusive alcoholic who left Joe, his mother, and his siblings when Joe was young. Joe’s mother couldn’t stand up to her angry husband or to Joe.

It wasn’t long before Joe began running with the wrong crowd. Rampant drug use, assault with a deadly weapon, and breaking and entering homes were just a few of the crimes that would eventually sentence him to incarceration in three California state prisons, which Joe describes as “hate factories.”

“I never thought I would live to be this old, and I’m only thirty-three,” Joe says. “I always thought I would die young—in prison or on the streets. I literally had no hope. I never thought to dream, never thought to envision my life outside of the walls. I didn’t think I was worth it. I never thought of having a family, raising boys, or loving my wife. Those things weren’t for me. I was garbage.”

After he was released from prison, Joe lived for a year and a half at a drug recovery center in the Sacramento area. It was there that he met a young woman who was also a recovering addict. Joe has tattoos all over his body, remnants of his former life. The one on his neck, however, which reads “Carmin,” represents the love of his life.

For three years Carmin had lived on the streets of Tacoma. She did ecstasy and smoked pot, but methamphetamines were her “drug of choice.”

Carmin’s parents, Tom and Donna Moline, are directors of Covenant Cascades Camp Conference Center near Yelm and members of Crossroads Church. Both were heartbroken over their daughter. “We did everything we could to reach her,” Donna says. “For years, we didn’t know where she was. We would hear from someone there was a Carmin sighting, but we hit a lot of dead ends. All we could do was pray.”

Carmin came to the end of her rope

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Joe and Carmin Ottley

one day in a motel room in Tacoma. A friend of hers called Tom and Donna to tell them that Carmin “was in danger.” Carmin was praying when her cell phone rang and caller ID showed her parents’ number. She usually didn’t answer when they tried to reach her, but this time she did. “I started to cry,” she says. “I knew God was working on me at that moment.”

Tom drove to Tacoma, picked up Carmin, and put her on a plane for Sacramento, where she checked into a detox center.

Carmin spent a year and a half in a transitional program called Clean and Sober Transitional Living, where she met Joe. A friend of the Molines, North Pacific Conference Superintendent Mark Novak, contacted people at his former church, Redeemer Covenant in the Sacramento suburb of Orangevale.

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He asked a few members of the congregation to “keep an eye on Carmin.”

Carmin began attending Redeemer. Eventually, she brought the “tattooed freak,” as Joe calls himself, to church. The congregation put their arms around them. Joe and Carmin became involved in the life of the church, including working with the youth. Carmin re-dedicated her life to Christ, and Joe accepted Jesus into his heart for the first time in his life.

“I cannot name one sermon in particular that changed my life,” Joe says. “But I can name four or five men who loved me into the kingdom of God.”

One of those men was Dave Holmquist, a lay pastor at Redeemer. He first met Joe and Carmin at the Clean and

married couple, without Dave and Carol. They took us under their wing.”

Soon after Joe and Carmin were married, Carmin’s parents proposed an idea. Her father suggested that Joe and Carmin start a drug and alcohol recovery program in Yelm. The Ottleys took a trip to Yelm, and on a rare sunny day in February, while riding horseback on the 1,000-acre Cascades Camp property, Joe said he heard the loud voice of God tell him, “You’re moving.”

“I turned to Carmin,” Joe says, “and asked, ‘You want to move here?’ She said, ‘Yep.’”

But the decision wasn’t that cut-and-dried. Joe had gotten a good job in the Sacramento area, not an easy feat for an ex-convict. He was doing well in

sino after work on his way home. One day Carmin asked where the money in the checking account had gone for the month’s rent. Joe had gambled it away.

“Carmin was pretty upset,” Joe recalls. “She looked at me and said, ‘What are we up here for? You need to get your head in the game.’ I’d say that was the turning point.”

The community of Yelm was at first resistant to the idea of a recovery program in town, particularly one with a Christian emphasis. Neighborhoods often protest the presence of transitional housing, and Yelm has an especially eclectic mix of people. On the outskirts of town is Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment. Its leader is a self-



Joe relaxes with two TMTL residents.



Two TMTL homes where ex-cons and men recovering from alcohol and drug addictions stay.



Sober program. Describing his first impressions of Joe, Dave says, “He had this charisma about him that was striking. You saw that when he led the meetings at Clean and Sober. He had a gift. When he worked with the youth here, the kids loved him. Everybody loved him.”

Dave began to meet with Joe for Bible study and prayer on a regular basis. He and his wife, Carol, became like a second set of parents to Joe and Carmin. In 2002, Dave officiated at their wedding ceremony.

“Dave just loved me,” Joe says. “He grabbed a hold of me and wouldn’t let go.”

Carmin adds, “Joe and I would not be here together, individually or as a

the job, and had an opportunity for advancement as a warehouse manager. He went out to breakfast with Dave Holmquist to talk about his dilemma.

“I was going to get my own store and make good money,” Joe recalls. “Dave asked me, ‘Do you believe God called you to Yelm?’ I said yeah. He said, ‘You have to go then.’”

In 2004, Joe, Carmin, and their two boys, Andrew and Joe, moved to Yelm. Joe took a job to pay the bills while the groundwork was laid for TMTL. It meant a long commute to work and a late-night shift.

But things weren’t going well on the home front. Joe was lonely and miserable. He began to revert back to some of his old ways. He began stopping at a ca-

proclaimed, new-age channeler and lives in a French-chateau-styled mansion. The drug culture in the area is also strong. Yelm borders Pierce County, the second-largest producer of methamphetamines in the country.

“They didn’t want us in town,” says Carmin.

But the Ottleys and Crossroads Covenant were persistent. Crossroads, a church plant of the North Pacific Conference, applied for and received a \$10,000 Churches Planting Ministries matching grant from the denomination, which helped pave the way for the purchase of TMTL’s first home. In 2005, four men moved into the transitional home, a four-bedroom, 2,000-square-foot building adjoining

the property that will one day be home to a new building for Crossroads.

Joe initially served half-time as TMTL director and half-time as youth pastor at Crossroads. He now is the full-time executive director of TMTL. Carmin works part-time as the business administrator.

“It’s been fun to see this ministry grow,” says Russ Blake, Crossroads pastor and member of TMTL’s board. “We helped get it started, but as it grew to a more significant level, it became obvious it was becoming its own ministry.”

A second home followed in 2006, and a third home for former inmates with mental health disorders was finished in 2007.

TMTL residents pay a monthly fee of \$500, which includes room, food, utilities, and access to facilities and programs. The rent money doesn’t pay all of TMTL’s bills, so the orga-

TMTL started in 2005, more than 100 men have lived in the residences.

One resident has been with TMTL from its inception. He stays, not because he’s not ready to rejoin society, but because he chooses to be a partner in TMTL’s ministry. Chris arrived with a mohawk and a long history of drug abuse. He is now a house manager, does a lot of the cleaning, helps with the cooking, and is a member of the TMTL board. “God has absolutely healed him, mind, body, and soul,” Carmin says.

The men at TMTL are active in the community. TMTL is a member of the local chamber of commerce, and the men frequently help neighbors with yard work. “I believe the community appreciates them,” Joe says. “I recently had a conversation with the chief of police and he is very supportive of the work we are doing.”

Many of the men also attend Crossroads. Individuals who wouldn’t oth-

spoke at the April fund-raiser, praising a ministry that is truly making a difference in the community.

Joe, a dynamic and passionate proclaimer of the gospel, has preached on several occasions at Crossroads Covenant. He also is a popular speaker at youth retreats and men’s retreats for Covenant churches in the conference.

He does not push the gospel onto the men at TMTL. But most of the men there do meet Jesus. As far as Joe’s testimony goes, he just lives it.

“I don’t believe in proclamation,” he says. “I believe in demonstration. We can proclaim the gospel, but it’s going to be much more received when we demonstrate the grace of the gospel.”



Kenny, who manages one of the TMTL houses, was once a resident himself.

Joe knows about grace. The “hole in Joe’s soul” has been filled with the life-changing love of Jesus Christ. He is conveying that love to men who are walking the same road he did. “I have the tattoos,” he says. “They understand where I’ve been. I’ve walked in their shoes. Knowing what they’re feeling opens the doors wider because I can speak from experience.”

Joe and Carmin don’t want to just introduce people to Jesus. They want to be the body of Christ to those around them. “Some wish to live within the hearing range of congregational bells,” Joe says, “but I wanna be on a rescue ship on the lake of hell. ‘You’ve been here?’ ‘Yes, I’ve been here.’ ‘Show me the way out.’ ‘C’mon, let’s go.’” □

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nization relies on monthly donations from individuals and churches, such as Crossroads and Redeemer. The men—most of whom have full-time jobs—take classes in conflict resolution, the Bible, and budgeting. They also attend meetings offered by recovery groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

TMTL’s three homes have space for twenty-four men. The Ottleys give the men the same measure of grace they received on the path to recovery from drug addiction. They insist, however, that the men remain clean and sober. Even so, Carmin says, “The essence of recovery is wrapped around turning yourself over to God, and turning yourself over to spiritual principles.”

The transformation in the lives of men has been nothing short of amazing. They can stay as long as they like, though the average stay is about nine months. The goal is for each man to leave drug-free and prepared to be a productive member of society. Since

erwise feel comfortable walking into a church feel connected and accepted by the congregation. “The majority of our people accept them with open arms,” says Blake. “The men are a regular part of the church life at Crossroads. They serve as ushers. They are part of the worship setup team.”

The future is bright for TMTL. A fund-raiser in April netted nearly \$50,000. The proceeds from that will build a fourth home, for women, and will allow Carmin, who has been paid for one day a week, to move to three days a week. The women’s home is expected to open this fall.

In August 2007, the Washington Corrections Association named Joe and Carmin citizens of the year for their work with TMTL. More recently, the program received an award from the state Behavioral Health Resources Mental Health Foundation for its work in the mental health community. A corrections officer for Thurston County