

# RISE & RECONNECT

The Miracle of Recovery in Community

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE  
YSS RECOVERY HOMES



## A Place To Call Home

Youth Services System Inc.'s Recovery Homes were started by Shelley and the late Bill Rohrig to honor the memory of their son Mark who had struggled with depression and died after a fall. Lazarus House and Mark's House serve men, and Mary & Martha House serves women who are working toward getting their lives back on track after treatment for substance use disorder. This is a residential, gender-specific program. It is a place to call home, with as many of the comforts of home as possible within our means and budget.



## Stand and Wait

By Nic Cochran | Assistant Director, YSS Recovery Homes

In December of 2019, I left my seminary studies with the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. I moved back to Wheeling, to the House of Hagar Catholic Worker house in East Wheeling and began working at the YSS Winter Freeze Shelter. I wanted my work to be as far from my seminary experience as I could get, and that position fitted the bill. Seminary had its high points, but time spent immersed in academic work with no real or meaningful connections with people was very challenging for me.

As the time came for the annual closure of the Winter Freeze Shelter in March 2019, another dark reality was gathering: the threat of COVID-19. The workers were concerned for our own safety and that of the guests, and we knew that there was nothing more we could do than simply wait. On March 15th, the shelter closed and our guests were



**Nic Cochran, left, and Bobby G.**

sent out onto the streets to rebuild the meager lives they had continually eked out for themselves under bridges and in various encampments around Wheeling. Then on March 18th the governor issued a stay-at-home order, and we all hunkered down to continue to wait.

*(continued inside)*

## Continued from front

We found creative responses to the needs of our friends on the streets; we opened a shower station, Catholic Charities and the Soup Kitchen began serving meals to go, and I wondered what life would hold for me as I forged my way through this new landscape that has become all too familiar.

I continued to wait and see what God, and life, had in store for me. As a product of Jesuit education, I have learned to respond to God's promptings, not to rush them, nor to slam my fist on the table and demand answers, unless I just want to cause myself extra grief. I had spoken with John Moses about different positions at YSS that were open, but none of them seemed to be "the fit." I had wondered about the direction my life would take now that the priesthood seemed to be off the table, I knew I would always be involved with ministry in some capacity or another, and the work I was doing with people experiencing homelessness earned me the title of "The Street Priest." Yet, it still seemed that I was waiting for something to happen.

On a sunny day in June (remember how nice that was?) I got a phone call from my friend Fr. Pat, whom I had met shortly after

I moved to Wheeling back in 2014. We had maintained some contact over the years, and I always admired the work he had done at Lazarus and Mary & Martha House. In the course of our chat, he mentioned that he was trying to open a new house but would need some help in getting it off the ground and managing the expansion of the homes. Pat then invited me to consider whether

**"They also  
serve who  
only stand  
and wait."**

~ John Milton

or not I would be willing to come on board and help. It seemed that my waiting had finally paid off.

As a person in recovery and someone who works with people in recovery, I was excited at the prospect of making a life out of accompanying people on their journey of sobriety. I jumped at the chance, and Pat wisely told me to wait. I began coming around and talking to Pat and getting to know the men at the Lazarus House, but whenever I brought up the job position to Pat or John, I was advised to wait

and see. I was busy with my volunteer work at the House of Hagar and the shower station on 18th Street, but I was looking for something that could support me financially, and I was being told to wait. I (finally) began working at Mark's House in September, and the time I have spent here has been challenging and rewarding, but I cannot escape the wait.

Advent, a special time in the Christian tradition, is a time of preparation and waiting. 2020 has been much more hectic with the onset of a global pandemic and in many ways entails a period of waiting: waiting for a vaccine, waiting for safety, waiting for a return to "normalcy." While we wait for businesses to open, for family gatherings, for church services, for whatever

it is that is outside of ourselves that gives us a sense of purpose; at this time of year we are being invited to wait, and to prepare.

Advent began extra early this year (around March or so), and it is my hope we can all use this time to wait and prepare well. The business of our lives prior to the pandemic is stifled; the service work we do, the help we offer to our neighbors, all has been put on hold. However, as the author John Milton reminds us, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

# Grateful for a Second Chance .....

**My name is Douglas A.** I am 47 years old. I am a recovering alcoholic. I began drinking at the age of 20. I was a "functioning alcoholic." I held a job and made it appear to my family that I was a social drinker. It did not take long before my alcohol problem got out of control and my job was no longer able to support my habit. I started to steal and commit crimes to support my party life. During this time my family figured out that I had a problem and they stopped giving me money in hopes that having no money would help curb my problem. My family was unaware of my criminal activity.

The longer I went, the more serious the crimes were becoming. By the time I was 24 years old I was drinking between 3-5 pints of whiskey a day that that's not counting the beer I drank in between. I was out of alcohol one night, no money. I wanted, I needed, some alcohol. I found myself willing to do almost anything for that bottle of whiskey. I found myself in the middle of a terrible crime, becoming involved in a plot to kidnap a person.

We got caught, and November 8<sup>th</sup> of 1997 I went to prison. I had sentence of life without the chance of parole. My life came down to being an alcoholic and sitting in prison for the rest of my natural life.

My fourth night at Mt. Olive Correctional Center the correctional officer slid an envelope under my cell door. I opened the envelope and it was my time sheet. As I read



**Douglas, left, and Charles in front of the Christmas tree at Mark's House.**

down the paper, I realized that I was not ever getting out of prison. I sat down on my bunk and cried. After about 40 minutes I made a decision. I had been a terrible father and son. I made the decision that, even if I spent the rest of my life in prison, I would be a better person. I refused to allow my past to decide who I am or who I'm going to be. I began to make changes.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 23 years and 30 days after being incarcerated, I walked out of prison on parole. I left prison with a Bachelor's Degree and a lot of computer skills. I left prison, proud to be sober for 23 years; and most of all, I left prison a child of God.

I was glad to be accepted into the YSS Recovery Homes Program at Mark's House. Being here has helped me so much with my sobriety and my transition back into society. Being in prison for 23 years, I was really scared coming back into society, but Pat and the guys in the house have given me the confidence that I needed. Thank you all very much!

**"I refused to allow my past to decide who I am or who I'm going to be."**  
~ Douglas

## A NOTE FROM PAT .....

We hope you will excuse the lateness of our Christmas newsletter! 2020 was quite the year, I'm sure you'll agree. We hope to continue our semi-annual chicken and spaghetti dinners in 2021, but we do not have concrete plans yet. Thank you for keeping us in your prayers and for your continued support. ~ Pat Condron



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### Donations to YSS Recovery Homes — Lazarus, Mary & Martha and Mark's House

Enclosed is my gift for Lazarus/Mary & Martha/Mark's House:

\_\_\_ \$200 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_ Other amount

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

If you wish your donation to be anonymous, check here

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*If you wish to UNSUBSCRIBE to this mailing list, please email Pat Condron, frpatanthony@msn.com.*

*Please make checks payable to YSS and mail to YSS, P.O. Box 6041, 87-15th Street, Wheeling, WV 26003. To ensure your donation is directed properly, include this form and/or write RECOVERY HOMES on the Memo line.*

**Thank you and God bless you!**