

The
**UNION
MISSION**

MISSION NETWORK

Food, Clothing, Shelter ... and so much more!

MAY 2023



**“The Union Mission
is almost like a
hospital for your
whole human being!”**

Details on page 2

INSIDE: David's Path to Purpose | Our David Development Program for Young Men
Virtuous | VOMO | Change a Child's Life at Camp Hope Haven | Next-Generation Values



David with Lamont Harris

CLUB LIFE or CHRIST-Like?

David, 26, grew up loving Jesus, but he also loved the nightlife. It wasn't always easy to choose which to follow.

He was born in Tennessee to Romanian parents while his father was in seminary. After earning his Ph.D., they returned home, where his dad later served in the European Parliament. That honor meant fortune and fame for David's family, but his parents traveled often for work. "I started as a very good kid, but I had some finances and I had a lot of free time. Nothing good came out of it."

In the fourth grade, some older neighbors introduced David to partying. "They didn't have money, so they snuck me out of the house and into a nightclub." The nightlife "captivated" him. At first, it wasn't the dancing, drugs, music, cocktails, or celebrities. "I liked the mystery—the different crowds, different lights, different vibe." In his teens and 20s, David even traveled the world to experience some of the most lavish and exclusive nightclubs. But after a few years, his party-hardy lifestyle felt empty. "I knew I was doing wrong," but "I got hooked."

Wanting to change his life, David moved to Virginia Beach for his senior year. He lived with family, plugged into a local church, worked at Chick-fil-A, and graduated from high school. He kept his life on track as he studied

*"It gives me confidence
that God is shining
His face again on me.
I know that He will work
things out for me...and I
know it'll be good."*

military science at a college he loved. But after transferring to another school to major in national security, he grew homesick and depressed. Against his parents' warnings, "I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. That got me back into the old David... girlfriend after girlfriend, a lot of clubs and parties, just having a good time."

But weeks before his graduation, an "unexpected incident" with his ex and

a "friend" led to an arrest warrant. David had never run afoul of the law, "not even a parking ticket." His attorneys urged him to turn himself in and he'd be out on bail in a few hours. It took nearly a week.

"That week my life changed 180°!" Desperate to calm his mind in jail, he asked a guard for something to read. "Guess what he gives me? Every time I opened that Bible, the Holy Spirit was speaking to me about exactly what I was going through. I knew there was a reason I was still there. God had to stop me to get my attention."

Unable to finish school or find work, David returned to Virginia, where he had changed his life before. Driving around as he tried to figure out his next steps, he prayed: "God, there should be a place where I can just walk in and they would just take me as I am."

Thinking The Union Mission was a church where he could go pray, he found himself instead at a homeless shelter. Lamont Harris, David Development Program Manager, listened as David poured out his problems. "There was no judgment," just an "it's okay, we'll take care of it together." The Mission staff would offer him sound advice, ways to save, and stability. With all the rules and free resources, "this is probably the best place for me to break my bad habits," David thought.

"I never expected my journey to lead me through here, but I'm thankful. You're not just getting a free bed and three meals a day, you're getting some spiritual help with the practical help. And that's combined with your mental, financial, physical, and emotional support. That's what I really like about this place."

Now David is working at a popular restaurant and as an organizer for a political candidate, and he's worked out a way to finish his classes to complete his college degree. He's experienced miracle after miracle, and most of the legal charges against him were dropped. "It gives me confidence that God is shining His face again on me. I know that He will work things out for me...and I know it'll be good."

For more about David's journey, see Stories of Hope at unionmissionministries.org.

PATH to PURPOSE Campaign

Our David Development Program



Lamont Harris directs our David Development Program designed to help our youngest Bashford Men's Shelter guests overcome homelessness. Learn how the program is guiding young men to live productive, meaningful lives.

So, Lamont, give us an overview.

It's our pathway of resources for all our guests 18 to 31. Many are homeless for the first time, so we try to weed out the root causes before their homelessness becomes recurrent. We teach them about work, life skills, relationships, and good mental health—as well as introducing them to the Lord.

How is that different from other shelter services?

It provides more personalized attention. We put our focus on healing past hurts, improving current conditions, and providing direction for each young man's future. Instead of trying to find just a quick fix for their most immediate problem, we look for lasting solutions for many issues so they can be successful.

As a mentor, I share how I've lived through many of the same things they have. God prepared me with first-hand personal and professional experience that helps me provide them with resources for their age and situation.

What has caused these guys to become homeless?

In the past, many came to us because family put them out for not being responsible. Now most are coming from harder life situations: mental health facilities, foster care, and prison. A lot of them are referred to us. The word is out that you can come to The Union Mission and get real help.

What services and skills do you work on first?

Developing a relationship with God and His Word, knowing that they are worthy—that's at the heart of our program. Then we then address barriers to employment and permanent housing, like photo IDs, birth certificates, savings, GEDs. Documents and basic life skills are good first steps since some have never had a job, an apartment, or a bank account before.

Many men are very guarded when they arrive at the shelter. They only come to the Mission because they don't have anywhere else to go. A lot have been traumatized or beaten down. They've been told they'll never be any good—and they believe that. Or they're tough from protecting themselves and from living in survival mode.

Usually we need to do a full physical and mental health assessment with a physician or counselor to diagnose illnesses or disorders. Then we can help more fully.

These are real investments in their success.

So many don't believe they can have a good future, but we help them recognize

God's plan for their lives. In addition to prayer and spiritual support, therapy can help them process their pain and learn new relationship tools and coping strategies to become healthy and whole. I work with them through this entire process. My guys know that if they need assistance, I am available, here and now in the program and later in aftercare.

How long do most stay here with us?

It's usually about 90 days. Since 2021 when we revamped the program, around 85% have found housing or were reunited with family, and most others left voluntarily. I'm overjoyed that the guys are really doing what they're supposed to.

That includes working, right?

We have great relationships with business partners across the area, and many of them contact us when they need good hires. The men in our program have a track record for being reliable and hard workers. We've had David program guys in sales, delivery, warehouse, manufacturing, restaurants, human resources, drivers, customer service,



commissary stocking, retail, security, hotel and hospitality, shipyard trades, even the military.

For a lot of the guys, these are their first “real” jobs and they often earn a living wage to start. It’s a career path for those who do well. Some are even promoted to management roles.

How about education?

We work with Tidewater Community College, Centura College, ECPI, Regent, and online options. I’ve got four former David guests in school, and others have completed their programs. Some are studying computers, engineering, or trades like welding. I’ve got two guys in a carpentry work-study internship, and some culinary grads. We even have a few in aftercare who are in school and work!

What life skills do these guys most need to learn?

The #1 thing we teach them is to take care of *themselves*. If they don’t, they’ll probably be homeless again. The men who can get past their anger and traumas, and take responsibility for their decisions, those are the ones who really thrive!

Last year about a quarter of your men were parents.

Thankfully that’s lower this year! A few do have children, but they have good relationships with their kids and support them. They want to be good fathers without a court order.



Do the David guys see you as a father figure?

Occasionally. Many of these guys were raised by mom or grandma, and now I’m finding that a lot of them grew up just with their fathers. But sometimes those relationships are strained if there’s no real parental affection. I remind them that even if their father wasn’t a good dad, he taught them what *not* to do in their relationships.

How important is the program’s aftercare?

Aftercare lets us follow up with these young men for two years after they’ve left the Mission and maintain the relationships we’ve built. It’s one thing to *obtain* housing. It’s another to *sustain* housing. Our aftercare check-ins help them keep their new lives heading in a good direction with ongoing resources and connections. On the whole, the men in aftercare are really flourishing and working on their futures! That’s a blessing!

Last year you listed a lot of dreams for the David Development Program.

And some have come true, like the mental health support! Hopefully our partnerships can grow with these counseling providers.

With more young men coming to the Mission, a David Development Assistant could help track the guys’ progress and set up peer-to-peer sharing opportunities, including the men in aftercare. With more staff we could also focus on building community support and sponsors to fund more group outings. I’d also love to be able to offer an in-house substance abuse recovery program, as well as more on-campus educational enrichment, relationship classes, and specialized training. I have big dreams for the David Development Program, but I know it will take more support.

For the full interview with Lamont Harris, see our David Development Program webpage at unionmissionministries.org/ways-to-give/changing-futures.

And help homeless young men fulfill the promise of their potential at

unionmissionministries.org/purpose



In May we changed over to using Virtuous, a more robust and interactive customer relations management system. The transition has gone well so far, but we do want to assure that all of our donors also have a good experience. If you encounter any challenges with your donations or have any questions, just email us at giving@ummnorva.org.



As part of our Virtuous transition, we’ve moved to VOMO, our new volunteer mobilization interface. Registration for service opportunities is no longer available in CERVIS.

All volunteers should set up a VOMO profile. To get started, simply enter this URL and follow the prompts:

unionmission.vomo.org/org/the-union-mission-ministries

Remember that Volunteer Orientation is the first step to on-campus service.

JOB OPENINGS

If you’re looking for meaning beyond the mundane, maybe you should work at the Mission. We’re hiring both shelter and ministry support staff! View all current employment openings or apply for a position online at

unionmissionministries.org/job-opportunities.



5100 E. VIRGINIA BEACH BLVD.
NORFOLK, VA 23502
757-627-8686



Thank you for Your Generosity!



REV. JOHN W. GRAY, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you're blessed like I was, you were young when you came to know Jesus. And your relationship with the Lord made a real difference. You knew from that point on that you would always be loved, you would never be alone, and you would always have help—no matter how difficult life got to be.

We wish everyone had that benefit, yet every year we meet more and more young men whose lives have been thrown off course by life-altering situations and traumas beyond their control. Thank God that through our David Development Program, these youngest Bashford Men's Shelter guests, ages 18 to 31, are finding wholeness and hope. They are learning to stand in God's strength, moving forward with courage and faith to slay the giants that have terrorized them for so long. They are growing in ability, in confidence, and in the Lord!

And when Camp Hope Haven begins next month, we'll have the joy of sharing the love of God and the good news of the Gospel with hundreds of excited boys, girls, and teens. We know that our camp is where many of these precious youth will first hear about Jesus, and we pray that all of them will come to know Him as their Savior.

Our ministry is possible only because of your partnership. May the Lord bless you for your heart to help, your faithful prayers, and your generous giving!

In His service,



CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE with a week at CAMP HOPE HAVEN

For many kids, a week of summer camp is a treat their family cannot afford.

BUT FOR JUST \$150, you can sponsor a child for a week at Camp Hope Haven. This summer they'll enjoy nature walks, swimming, sports, team games, and, of course, Bible lessons on our beautiful campus in rural Virginia Beach. Introduce a child to the joy and love of Jesus!

Give to
transform
a life!



SCAN TO GIVE ONLINE
unionmissionministries.org/Camp

Rev. Gray, I want to help young people find their purpose through The Union Mission!

I've enclosed: \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 \$_____

I would like to commit to a **monthly gift** of \$_____. My first gift is enclosed.

Method of Payment: Check VISA MasterCard American Express Discover

Card Number _____ CCV Code _____

Expiration Date _____ Signature _____

Please make your check payable to The Union Mission. To make an online donation, go to donate.unionmissionministries.org.



Please complete this slip and return it to The Union Mission with your generous gift. Your gift is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. We will send a receipt for your records.

05-2023

TRANSFER YOUR

Values

“Too many people spend money they haven’t earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like,” the humorist Will Rogers once observed.

As humans, our emotions and motivations are connected to the way we spend money. Matthew 6:21 says: “Wherever your treasure is, that’s where your heart is as well.” As a supporter of The Union Mission Ministries, you already understand how to give generously and with purpose. You’ve aligned your donations with your biblical values—but do your children and grandkids know how to do the same?

Here are three ways you can help them make God-honoring decisions like yours:

WRITE IT DOWN.

Writing is the clearest way to communicate your thoughts and values. Compose letters for your loved ones that share personal stories, lessons you’ve learned, your journey of faith, and loving words that explain how you feel about them. You could also draft an ethical will to add a personal, heartfelt dimension to your legacy plan and be clear about what you want them to know.

COLLABORATE MISSIONALLY.

Do you have funds earmarked for supporting Christian organizations or blessing others? Invite your loved ones to share input on where to give, then donate together. Or invite them to volunteer with a cause you support or find a way you can serve the Lord together. By demonstrating your values with personal actions, your family will have a roadmap to do the same.

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE.

It’s the most meaningful investment you can make in the lives of your children or grandchildren. Don’t miss your opportunity to share the most important things. Be a reliable and trustworthy source. Be generous with your time, your presence, and your listening ear. Your love will speak volumes and set a powerful Christ-like example, even after you’re gone.

Inspire the next generation to live and give with purpose—it’s a legacy that will truly last!

IT’S EASY TO INCLUDE THE UNION MISSION MINISTRIES IN YOUR WILL!

To create a will that reflects your values and blesses others, visit www.christianwill.org/umm or contact Helen Sommer at 757-627-8686, x504 or legacygiving@ummnorva.org.

Comments / Change of Address:

EMAIL

PHONE

THE UNION MISSION MINISTRIES

P.O. BOX 3203 | NORFOLK, VA 23514 | 757-627-8686
info@ummnorva.org | www.unionmissionministries.org

No person is denied service based on race, creed, gender, disability, or national origin.

Photos are representative of actual Mission clients.

If you would like to donate much-needed supplies, please see unionmissionministries.org/ways-to-give/give-goods. Thank you!

In the event contributions exceed expenses, extra funds will be used to feed, shelter, and care for the hungry and homeless throughout the year.

Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 919-807-2214 or 888-830-4989 for NC residents.