


The
**UNION
MISSION**

MISSION NETWORK

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

NOVEMBER 2023

A man wearing a blue polo shirt with a logo, a grey cap, and glasses is smiling. He is standing in a doorway, holding a set of keys in his right hand. The background shows a brick wall and a dark door.

**"I thank God for the
Mission! They've been an
inspiration in my life."**

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Amazing Grace



sweet the sound—That saved
heart to fear, And grace
toils and snares I have
years, Bright shin -

With a Hymn in His Heart

FOR RANDY, THE CHURCH'S GREAT TUNES HAVE DEFINED HIS YEARS.

When Randy was 10, his mom would “drag me to church.” She made him join the choir, and he hated standing in front of the congregation. Today, Randy loves leading the worship at The Union Mission’s chapel services. His favorite hymns are titles that could well be the chapters of Randy’s life.

Amazing Grace

Randy’s been through his share of “dangers, toils, and snares,” including a season in which he thought about ending it all. After his first marriage ended, Randy became suicidal. But a pastor friend prayed with him, and hope was rekindled. “God brought me through that,” says Randy. “There’s a reason I’m still here.” And amazing grace is certainly part of it.

Randy’s second marriage also ended in divorce. In more recent years, he was a victim of chronic abuse in another relationship. Finally, Randy decided to leave, spending one night on the streets, sleeping in the shadow of the Martin Luther King memorial at Brambleton and Church Streets in Norfolk. Randy was beginning to feel free at last. He decided to go to the Mission the next morning—still lost, but about to be found.

I Surrender All

Randy connected with Raymond Evans, the Mission’s Resource Relations Manager. “He’s been a mentor to me,” Randy says. “I thank God for him, and for the Mission. They’ve been an inspiration in my life.” Before long, Randy joined our kitchen staff, and ended up on the serving line. “I love to see their smiling faces when they get a meal.”

Randy had joined the RECLAIM transitional program, but he got comfortable living at the Mission, though the goal is always independent living. Rev. Evans plays a key role in that process, working with a HUD program called Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, which helps many of our guests get into affordable housing in Norfolk. But when Randy’s time came, he didn’t want to move out, fearing he couldn’t make it on his own. He was 62 and had never lived alone. Rev. Evans sat Randy down for a heart-to-heart, and gave him the courage and confidence to make the transition. Randy decided it was time to surrender all...and he started packing.

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

Randy has been in his new place for four months—and he’s thrilled. “I was scared to step out on my own, but then I realized that people at the Mission were just trying to help me. I love it here.” Randy points to a new widescreen TV—a gift from a friend—and says he’s eager to have some men over for pizza and to watch some 49ers football.

He also wants to connect with family members again, including some he lost contact with. He hopes for a family reunion someday: “I’m trusting God for something like that.” Randy also dreams of traveling, naming Hawaii and Italy as his top destinations.

Just a few months ago, Randy was nervous about leaving the Mission. Now he’s talking about getting on a plane and flying halfway around the world. “I’m glad God steered me this way,” he says. “If you listen, He’ll lead you to the right place. Just let Him guide you.”

For Randy, it’s just a closer walk with Jesus. Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Serving Up More Than

During the holidays especially, The Union Mission's busiest rooms are our kitchen and dining halls. It's no small feat to serve three meals a day for 225 homeless shelter guests who could use a taste of home and a helping of hope.



MEET OUR FOOD SERVICES TEAM who prize both culinary quality and compassion.

LABRENITA WHITAKER loves "Chopped," the Food Network show where chefs must create a tasty meal from whatever ingredients are given to them. As our Director of Food Services, it's a skill set she's mastered. While volunteering in our kitchen five years ago, LaBrenita discovered that culinary work perfectly melded her natural talents and loves of cooking and baking, organizing, and teaching. Now she's responsible for the safety, operations, management, menus, and reputation of our Food Services department—and is studying to become a certified Chef de Cuisine.



DAVID MCNEAL is a hospitality industry veteran, working in kitchens since he was 17. He joined our Food Services Team in 2020 after the pandemic had closed down the Oceanfront hotel restaurant he managed. David never expected to become homeless, but he rebuilt his life here in our Bashford Men's Shelter as part of RECLAIM. His volunteer work in the Mission kitchen earned him a full-time job planning, prepping, cooking, and serving delicious meals for our guests.



LEROY WHITAKER always considered cooking his hobby. In his youth, he learned the basics from his parents, especially his father, who was an "exceptional cook." As he's grown older and wiser, the semi-retired purchasing agent has come to see the importance of healthy eating. He's been working the lunch shift in the Mission kitchen for two years now, under the direction of his daughter. But it's not difficult, he says, since the Food Services Team is a lot like family.



LARRY MONROE sees a good meal from two different viewpoints: a longtime restaurant worker and a former hungry, homeless addict. In 2017, "God got His hands on me and answered my prayers." Larry never looked to drugs again, and joined the Mission kitchen team in 2020. He works as a porter (unloading and storing groceries), cleaning, meal prepping, and setting up. But he most enjoys serving the guests with a smile. "I've been where they are. I can show them there's hope."



RANDY PARHAM volunteered for a year and a half before joining the Kitchen Crew three years ago. Long before he became homeless and came to stay at the Mission, he'd worked in fast-food restaurants, so it was easy to pick up where he'd left off. In addition to adding some gospel music flair to the kitchen, Randy focuses on serving meals (especially breakfast), cleaning the floors, washing dishes, unloading groceries, and taking care of whatever needs to be done.



JONATHAN LAND is the kitchen's newest staffer, starting just this past summer. But he's known the Mission well since his mother helps manage the Women's Shelter. In his eight years in food services, he's worked in several of our area's most popular restaurants. For now, to learn the ropes here, Jonathan does a bit of everything from dishwashing to food rotation to making sure that the meals are served piping hot. But he's looking forward to doing more and more cooking.



Learn more about our Food Services Team on the Mission's social media in November.

Give the Gift of Joy to those without a home this Christmas.

We need 225 Gifts of Joy bags for our Bashford Men's Shelter guests who will not be celebrating this holiday season with family or friends. If you would like to share the love of God with them in this way, then decorate a paper lunch bag, and fill it with the following items:

- Signed Christmas Card**
- Men's Manicure Set**
- Men's Wallet**
- Men's Underwear**



HRT Bus Pass AND \$10 Fast Food/Convenience Store Gift Card
 (https://gohrt.com/fares // Please deliver passes and gift cards separately outside of the bag.)

Please do not seal or staple the top of the bag closed.

Bring your completed bags to our Donation Drop-off just past the Overton Center and UMM Thrift Store.

MONDAY-FRIDAY | 9 AM-5 PM | BY DECEMBER 18

If you would like to participate, please email us at volunteer@ummnorva.org.

Just \$2.94 Provides a Delicious Holiday Meal!



As you sit around your Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner tables with family or friends, you will give certainly thanks for your many blessings. But for our homeless neighbors, many of them in our shelters, these holidays can be lonely days.

We hope you'll help our homeless shelter guests celebrate with a true holiday feast! You can provide a holiday meal—with all the fixings and the joy of celebrating with people who care—for just \$2.94! And the same is true every day of the year.

Give a Meal and Change a Life!

unionmissionministries.org/meals

Hope

Begins with a Meal!



The Union Mission has several great ways you can provide practical help for our hungry, homeless neighbors.

1 Pack bagged breakfasts for our shelter guests who work offsite.

A grab-and-go breakfast is a real help to those who leave early for work. Our easy packing lists suggest items you can include.

2 Prepare or cater a full, pre-cooked meal for our shelter guests.

You can provide a meal for either the Men's Shelter or the Women's Shelter—or both! Sample menus are available. And you can come serve the meal, too, if you wish.

3 Provide funds for either option.

Send us a check marked "Meals" in the memo line or use the online pulldown menu to select "Meals/Shelter" at:

donate.unionmissionministries.org

To schedule your meal delivery, request our sample shopping lists, or just learn more, email:

volunteer@ummnorva.org

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Thank you for Your Generosity!



REV. JOHN W. GRAY, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I love every issue of our newsletter, but this one is even more special to me. Randy, whose smiling face you see on the cover, may have started his Union Mission journey as a shelter guest, but over time and through God's grace he has become a blessing to many—and a friend to me. I will always be grateful for the times this dear brother stood beside me in the most difficult times of my life. And I'm delighted that he recently stood by me in happier times as I married my wife. Randy reminds me of the Bible character Onesiphorus. In 2 Timothy 1:16, Paul could have been talking about Randy: "He often refreshed me." He is constantly encouraging others.

You, too, are a constant encouragement to me, to our staff, and to our guests. Your faithful giving and heartfelt prayers make it possible for us to persevere in ministry. As we care for our homeless neighbors, we have the joy of seeing so many lives transformed by the love of God. It's a joy we know you share.

As we enter this holiday season and anticipate a bright and busy new year, we appreciate your unwavering support. May God bless you for your faithful generosity to those in need!

In His service,



As the year comes to a close

Why not make a holiday donation in honor of a friend, colleague, or special occasion—or honor the memory of a loved one? We'll acknowledge your tribute with a lovely card. Or it's not too late to make an extra year-end gift. It's tax-deductible, you'll help us start 2024 off well, and your kindness can change a life for good!

Please give generously today!
donate.unionmissionministries.org

Rev. Gray, I want to share holiday hope with those who are homeless in Hampton Roads!

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.



4 Ways

to share your story this Christmas



Dave Isay's earliest memories include capturing the stories of his grandparents and great-aunts on a cassette recorder. He later turned his love of stories into a vocation. His nonprofit StoryCorps has recorded the oral histories of more than 600,000 people and preserved them at the Library of Congress. From serious to side-splitting, these stories are important, especially to family and friends.

God has also given you a story to steward. Some parts are funny, others spotlight His faithfulness, and all of it has shaped the person you are and the values you hold dear. It's a story your family wants—and needs—to hear. Take advantage of holiday times together to share your story with loved ones.

Talk about traditions.

Why do you always serve spicy cranberry relish with Christmas dinner? When did you first attend the Christmas Eve service? Talking about traditions preserves memories, recalls God's goodness to you, and brings deeper meaning to these rhythms.

Impact others.

Your faith and your values are at the heart of your story. So are the causes close to your heart. Including a gift in your will to The Union Mission is a meaningful way to share that with your family—and impact others beyond your lifetime.

Go online.

There are many internet tools like **Storyworth** and phone apps like **Remento** to prompt and capture your stories. These can be especially helpful if you want to turn your story into a keepsake book or video.

Interview yourself.

We often think of interviewing others to get their stories, but you don't need to wait for someone to talk to you—do it yourself! Create a list of questions or find some online and share your answers.

Your faithful support over the years makes you a significant part of our story and we're so grateful!

When you share that with others, you embody these words from Psalm 78:4—

"We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done."

IT'S EASY TO INCLUDE THE UNION MISSION MINISTRIES IN YOUR GIVING!

To include us in your estate planning or change lives with a legacy gift, contact Helen Sommer at 757-627-8686, x 504.

To create a will that reflects your values and blesses others,

visit www.unionmission.christianwill.org or email us at legacygiving@ummnorva.org.

Comments / Change of Address:

EMAIL

PHONE

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.

THE UNION MISSION MINISTRIES

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