

The
**UNION
MISSION**

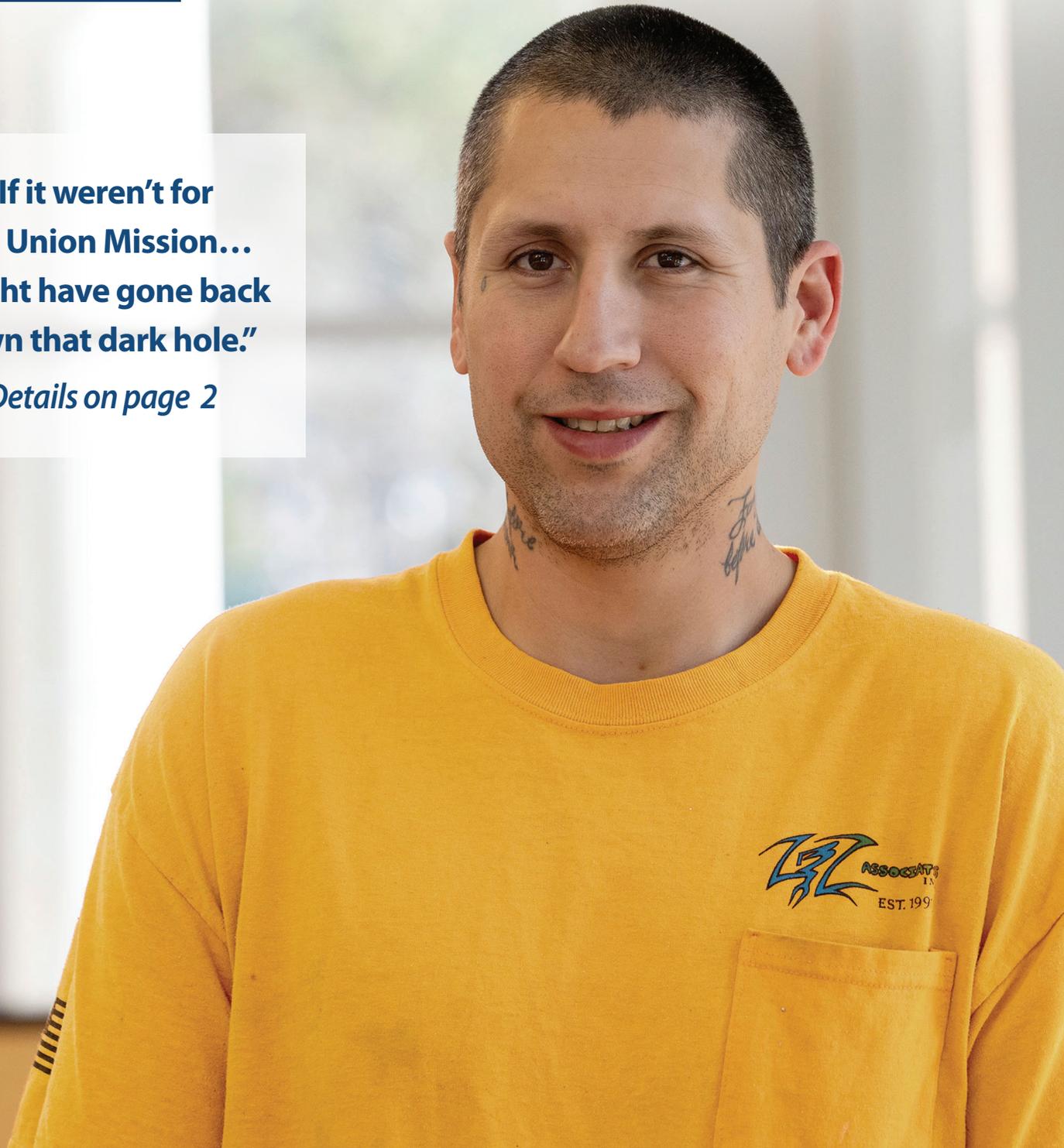
MISSION NETWORK

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

JANUARY 2024

**"If it weren't for
The Union Mission...
I might have gone back
down that dark hole."**

Details on page 2



INSIDE: Meet Our Sr. Director of Programs | From Prison to Peace
Your Will: Love in Action | The Year to Volunteer | Become an Anchor of Hope

The *Tats* tell the tale



How David found new life after prison,
thanks to your support of the Mission

It's remarkable what you can learn from a person's tattoos. Every drop of that ink is part of a journey.

That's certainly true of David, whose tats tell a tale of twists and turns that give a pretty good picture of the things that matter in his life.

At the top of that list are his two daughters. He got their names and birthdays tattooed "so I won't forget" their yearly celebrations, because it's easy to forget such things when you're doing time.

Almost half a lifetime ago, David, then 20, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for armed robbery while deep into the throes of heroin addiction. At the time, he had a 9-month-old and another on the way.

David, now 34, says all those years in prison "gave me time to think." He thought a lot about his girls, and that made him think about turning his life around. Ultimately, that led him to The Union Mission, where David has found new life and a future of hope and promise.

But before that, his tattoos told more of his story. Many of them, David got while incarcerated. For example, there's a picture of a guard tower with "The Price of Evil" written above it. He wanted a constant reminder of the price he paid for his choices while younger. "Heroin took me down a really bad path," he says.

GETTING RIGHT

Several of the tattoos David got while in prison have gang meanings, and he doesn't like to talk about them. He's renounced that lifestyle. But he will talk about a few others—like the teardrop that represents his grief over a friend who died in a drowning incident. Another tattoo has a military motto, Death Before Dishonor. Still another says, Family Before All. "I should have lived by that family motto 10 or 15 years ago," David says. "But I try to live by it now."

*"My relationship with
God has gotten stronger...
and given me peace."*

David's favorite tattoo is an image of a demon positioned over the Bible. The demon's arms are crossed and his head is bowed, "like he's repenting to God." Asked if that represents himself, David replies, "Yeah, kind of. He's trying to get back, trying to get right."

Long before he was released from prison, David knew he never wanted to go back. "Prison is a horrible place," he says. Thinking of his daughters carried him through, "but watching your kids growing up through pictures, that's rough."

FINDING PEACE

When he was released, David bounced around until he ran out of money and lived in his car for a while. When he'd had enough, he made his way to The Union Mission.

He says the staff, particularly his case manager, Rev. Raymond Evans, has been kind and helpful. They've helped him stay sober, gave him time to save money—he's a plumber on the verge of earning his professional certification—and equipped him with the life skills that will keep him on a good path.

And David's faith has been rekindled. "My relationship with God has gotten stronger," he says. "The Mission has given me peace."

David got engaged while at the Mission, and he and his fiancée recently bought a home. They've moved in, and he's working on gaining custody of his daughters—now 14 and 13—who have been living with their grandparents. They support his goal to reunite his family.

He's excited about the rest of his life, and is grateful for his time at the Mission. "If it weren't for The Union Mission, I would probably be sleeping in my car and doing something bad," David says. "I might have gone back down that dark hole."

"I'd like to give a shout-out to the Mission, and the counselors, for doing good things. It's an amazing thing!"

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

Maybe even amazing enough
to warrant its own *tattoo!*

A Familiar Face in a New Place of Leadership

Douglas D. Preston has been named The Union Mission's Senior Director of Programs, after a nationwide search. Learn how our former Ministry Director of the Bashford Men's Shelter is uniquely qualified for this important Executive Team role, and what's on his agenda for 2024.

Congratulations on your promotion, Douglas! As Senior Director of Programs, what are your main duties?

Thanks! In my new position I am responsible for enhancing our current shelter programs and supporting operations, assessing the needs of our shelter guests, and looking at trends in homelessness, in correlating factors, and in our community. All of this will help me to formulate new and appropriate programs. I am also responsible for building community partnerships to help those experiencing homelessness, and for developing our staff in a Christ-honoring environment.

So in this role you'll oversee both our Bashford Men's Shelter and our Women's Shelter. How are they similar, or different?

As I see it, the shelters are similar because they both seek to serve with excellence persons experiencing homelessness. They are also similar because both shelters have caring, compassionate staff who want to serve people and honor God. They are different because of the unique needs of the men and women being served. Each homeless guest has a different personal journey.

You'll also supervise our Wellness Program and the Mission's partnerships with key healthcare partners. What are you hoping for those resources?

Ms. Tambussi and Mrs. Harper are doing a wonderful job leading and operating the Mission's Wellness Program, and



Ms. Tambussi excels in managing our partnership with Sentara Health and their on-site Community Care Center, as well as our relationships with other healthcare providers. My hope, initially, is to provide support to the Wellness Program while I assess the needs of our homeless guests and look for ways to enhance the programs. I also plan to be proactive in thinking through and programming for the future as it relates to our Wellness Program and our community partners.

Is working here at The Union Mission your first experience with helping those who are experiencing homelessness?

No. Before coming to the Mission in 2016, I worked for several years as a community-based counselor in Virginia Beach. I regularly assisted clients with daily living skills, clinical needs, and getting suitable housing. During that time, I came to recognize and understand the causes of homelessness and the challenges associated with finding affordable and sustainable housing for unhoused neighbors in need.

You started here as a Men's Shelter Manager, then became a Case Manager, and then a Shelter Supervisor before becoming Ministry Director. How have these experiences prepared you to lead our shelters' operations?

Working in the multiple positions here at the Mission has uniquely prepared me for this important new assignment within the ministry. I have worked at all levels within the Men's Shelter structure, and doing this has given me insight to how all the ministry departments function and fit together. Having that broad, first-hand experience is a real plus.

People may not know that you are also a lawyer. How will your background in the law benefit you in this job?

My legal training has taught me how to think and to process things logically. It's taught me to look beyond just the surface, that there are a number of variables involved in any situation. Recognizing this forces me to seek clarification on matters that are unclear, to talk with all involved, not to pre-judge, and to gather as much information as possible before making a final conclusion.

And you've also served in mentorship and leadership in your church and are even a licensed minister....

Yes, and I'd say that my background there has given me the skill to properly use the Scriptures to encourage others. It has furthered prepared me to be able to minister to others, including our homeless shelter guests and staff alike.

In the Men's Ministry Director role, you worked closely with Rev. Crawley, who previously led our shelter operations. Do you have any takeaways from him?

I salute Rev. William Crawley for his leadership, for pouring into me, and for allowing me to grow as a leader in my own right. I hope I do the same for my staff.

What do you hope to work on first? Is there anything you're eager to enhance?

Though I'm familiar with a lot of what we've been doing in our shelters, I'm trying to spend a lot of time observing and praying first. I don't want to rush

the transition, but I would like to work on bringing some consistency to the programs that are being offered in our shelters. I hope to do more collaboration between the Men's Shelter and Women's Shelter teams.

I am excited to be working with a great team of individuals who are dedicated to serving those who are vulnerable and marginalized in our community. I am looking forward to increasing the synergy across the board in all of our programs.

Are you adding any new programs or positions?

For the near future, no, not until I first am able to properly onboard my replacement as the Men's Ministry Director. I already am engaged, however, in building relationships with my counterparts in other organizations similar to ours or who could be community partners.

What would you say about our current community partners?

We have so many great people, groups, and organizations who are dedicated to working with us—I don't want to try to name them all and accidentally leave someone out—and the service that each one renders is critical to the success of our ministry. Each and every one is important, and each one fits a strategic need.

The ministry has just completed some strategic planning. How do you think that will help our shelters and our service to others?

Yes, those strategic planning sessions were great! The outcomes will, in the long run, be a great benefit not only to our guests, but also to our team. In the short-term, it will lay the proper groundwork for the future. It also will help in areas of communication, accountability, and consistency.



I've heard you express how much you appreciate those who serve our ministry.

Yes, beyond our staff, I thoroughly enjoy engaging with our donors and with the individual volunteers who come to serve at the Mission. We have a great crew of concerned and caring individuals who have hearts for people, especially our guests.

Service seems important to you. As we close, do you have a favorite Scripture you would like to share about that?

I seek to live my life as Jesus said in Matthew 25:31-40: *"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited Me in. I needed clothes and you clothed Me. I was sick and you looked after Me. I was in prison and you came to visit Me."*

I don't want to miss the mark in serving others, because I believe that when I serve others, I am serving Jesus.



Your Year to Volunteer!

If you want to share your time, talents, or treasure to help others, The Union Mission and Hope Haven have some great opportunities for you!

STEP 1: Check out our website.

Our GET INVOLVED tab has pages for Volunteering and Collection Drives. And WAYS TO GIVE can direct you to our Most-Needed New Goods list. unionmissionministries.org

STEP 2: Get to know Christina!

As our Volunteer Engagement Coordinator, she can help you find a great way to serve or answer any of your questions. Contact her at x 415 or at volunteer@ummnorva.org.



STEP 3: Set up VOMO.

The app lets you sign up for orientation, peruse available opportunities, or record your volunteer hours. Get started at unionmission.vomo.org

A Paycheck and A Purpose

Are you looking for meaningful employment this year?

The Union Mission Ministries is hiring for several positions. Take a look at our current job openings online at:

unionmissionministries.org/job-opportunities



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757-627-8686



Thank you
for Your
Generosity!



REV. JOHN W. GRAY, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Together We Can! That was the theme of one of our recent staff worship services. As we gathered in our chapel and reflected on Romans 15:5-6, it was a timely opportunity to unite our hearts in Jesus.

I consider this a good launch pad for our new year of ministry. As we thank God for all He has done, the most exciting prospect is that 2024 offers even more opportunities to care for our guests—with you, our faithful family of donors. Together, let's follow the Lord this year in serving our homeless neighbors, and in heeding the Word to "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice."

I am grateful for your partnership as we love and serve our homeless friends together. And one of the Mission's greatest blessings is when our donors want to become Anchors of Hope. We appreciate every donor, of course, but our **monthly** donors hold a special place in our hearts. Their dependable gifts sustain our ministry, and their commitment to giving monthly helps us with budgeting, planning, and stewardship to invest our resources wisely to help others. Just as our needs are ongoing, so is their support. It's the perfect alignment with God's call to care for the most vulnerable in our community.

Hundreds of our faithful donors have made the commitment to give monthly as sustainers. I pray that 2024 is the year that we'll welcome you as an Anchor of Hope, too!

In His service,

ANCHORS of HOPE ...

As a faithful monthly donor, you are changing lives!

"The Union Mission helped me have someplace to stay when I didn't know where I could go!" —Tammy

"I thank God for The Union Mission for helping me. They saved my life! It has strengthened me and encouraged me to be around the ladies working at the Women's Shelter." —Pam

"I arrived with the clothes on my back and not a penny to my name. Now, with The Union Mission's help, I have income, health coverage, a positive attitude, and trust in God. I am so grateful to the donors. You are not only providing shelter, food, and clothes. You are helping men and women to work towards a new life in Jesus Christ."

—Tim from RECLAIM on Facebook

Become an Anchor of Hope today!

Sign up online at
donate.unionmissionministries.org
or contact us at
anchorsofhope@ummnorva.org.

Rev. Gray, I want to help The Union Mission give hope to others!

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.

01-2024

Legacy Planning

IS AN ACT OF LOVE

Long before Dr. Gary Chapman became a *New York Times* bestselling author, he was a husband in a struggling marriage. His wife was frustrated that he didn't do much around the house. He was disappointed that she didn't appreciate his words of encouragement. One night she told him, "You keep saying 'I love you,' but if you love me, why don't you help me?"

That's when the lightbulb went on: they each showed love differently. Gary used words. His wife served others. That discovery led the counselor to write *The Five Love Languages*, which has helped millions understand that people express love in varying and sometimes unexpected ways.

Have you ever thought about legacy planning as an act of love? Creating a will (and keeping it updated) is a declaration of care for your family, as well as the causes close to your heart.

Your legacy plan is an act of love that...



... serves your family.

When people pass away without a will, it leads to confusion and heartache. Putting together a legacy plan now ensures that your finances are in order, your final wishes are clear, and your family is spared unexpected stress and expense.



... shares what matters.

Your will is an opportunity to communicate with your loved ones—both in heartfelt words and in how you choose to share God's blessings—what's most important to you: your faith, guiding principles, values, and beliefs.



... spreads the love.

You make God's love known in word and deed when you leave a gift in your will to The Union Mission. Your generosity embodies Jesus' words in John 13: "By this, everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

Tokens of love like cards and roses will always have their place, but a purposeful legacy plan is a lasting, loving expression of your heart.

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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