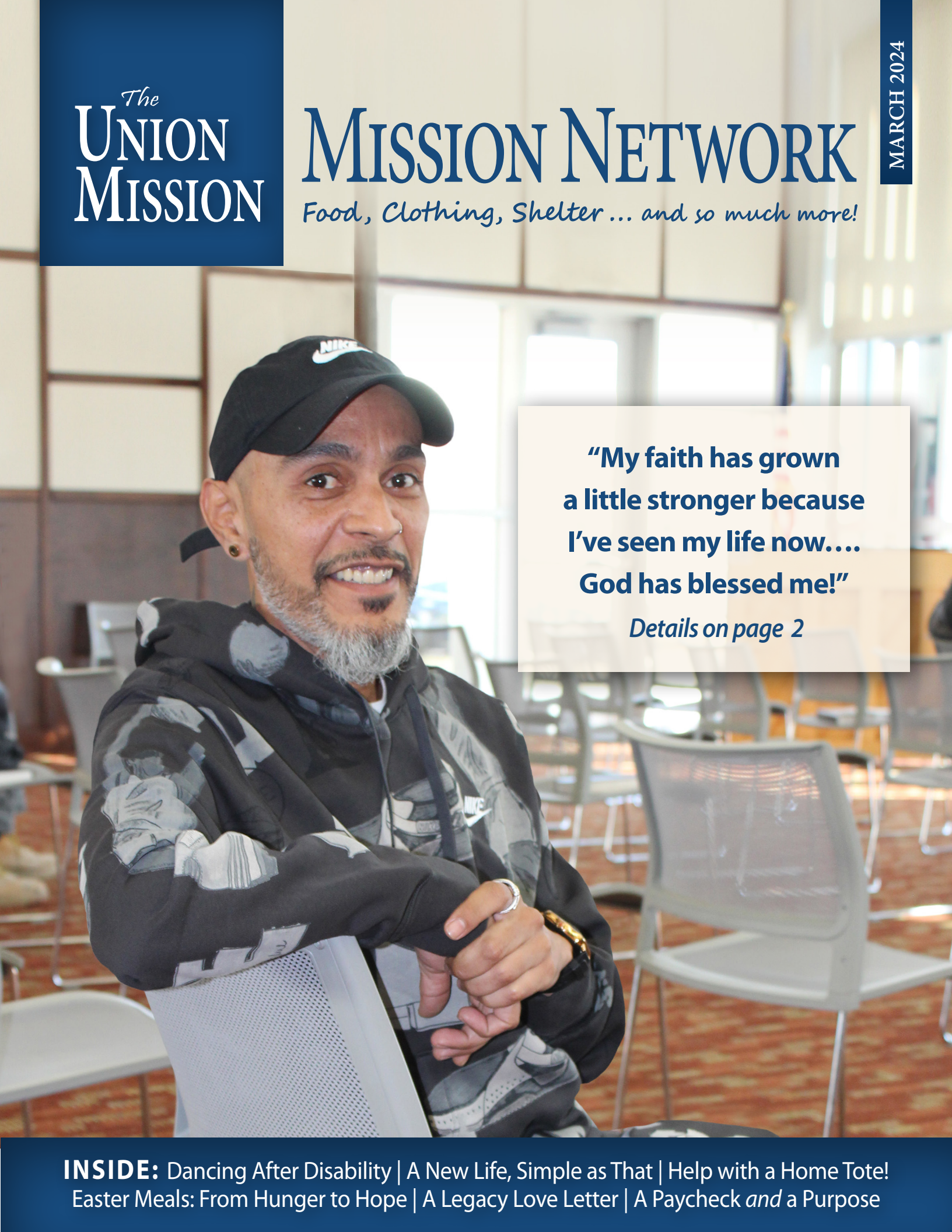


The
**UNION
MISSION**

MISSION NETWORK

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

MARCH 2024



**“My faith has grown
a little stronger because
I’ve seen my life now....
God has blessed me!”**

Details on page 2

INSIDE: Dancing After Disability | A New Life, Simple as That | Help with a Home Total!
Easter Meals: From Hunger to Hope | A Legacy Love Letter | A Paycheck *and* a Purpose

"I Know I'll Dance Again"



Multiple Sclerosis robbed Joel of much of his mobility. But you've helped him land on his feet.

"I GREW UP TOO QUICKLY!"

Joel and his younger brother were raised by a single mom, a weekend dad, and often a loving grandmother "who took us to church all the time." Still, during bouts of homelessness, they would sleep in abandoned buildings. "We struggled, but I don't ever remember being hungry."

But "I grew up too quickly" and "got caught up with a bad crowd" as a teen, Joel says. "I dabbled in alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine."

When finances got especially tight, Joel's mom sent her boys to her mother in Puerto Rico. Joel hated it there, and his drug use turned to addictions that spiraled out of control.

After a few years, Joel's mom brought her boys back home to New York. As Joel became an adult, he held several jobs over the years. He was married for a while and had three children. Joel eventually kicked his addictions, and he has now been sober more than 10 years. Life was looking up... till he woke up that morning, partially paralyzed.

"I'VE BEEN BLESSED!"

At the Mission, Joel took advantage of just about every class and program. "Whatever Rev. Evans asked of me, I did it because I know in the long run, it was going to benefit me." Joel also found a brotherhood of positive, Christian support during his long wait for housing.

All Joel ever wanted to do is move to the music. Born in Brooklyn and raised in Manhattan, the son of Puerto Rican parents was filled with the beats of the city streets and the Latin rhythms of the Caribbean. "I'm a dancer at heart," he says. "I've always loved it. It's what I do."

But that love of dance received an unexpected blow a few years ago when Joel, then 46, woke up one morning unable to move on the right side of his body. "Out of nowhere, boom, I woke up paralyzed."

He called 9-1-1. Paramedics assumed he'd had a stroke, but after a battery of hospital tests and four MRIs, Joel was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

He was stunned...and devastated. "I had to learn to walk all over again," he says. "I had to use a walker."

Suddenly unemployed and unable to pay rent, Joel was soon evicted. He decided to seek help at The Union Mission. "They told me to be there the next morning by 9," he says. "I was here at 8, waiting in front of those doors. I got in, and everything has been a blessing ever since."

Though he was a model shelter guest, Joel could not move out till he had an income. His MS qualified him to receive Social Security Disability Insurance, but SSDI applicants are frequently turned down several times before they're approved.

It was a godsend that an attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia worked *pro bono* to assist him through the process. When Joel finally was approved, he was owed a sizeable amount of back pay. As soon as he got that check, he paid off debts and put the rest aside to move into his own place.

With that steady income, Joel was selected for Norfolk's Tenant-Based Rental Assistance—a H.U.D. subsidy that helps lower-income renters afford an apartment. Now his move-out is just weeks away. "I see myself in my home."

And his health has slowly improved since his diagnosis. Though he tires easily and is still weak on his right side, Joel can now walk without a cane. He says it's "a blessing" that the MS "has not been painful. I can live with this."

With further improvement—and God's help—Joel has great hopes for the future: to live independently, to buy a used car, to visit family or have them visit him. "My faith has been strongest since I've been here, for sure. I have strong, strong faith!" And despite the MS, he is not afraid to dream big: "I know I'm going to dance again," he says. "I know I am!"

For more about Joel's and Eugene's journeys, see

Telling It Like It Is

Eugene says The Union Mission saved his life. Simple as that.



Simple as that. If you spend any time talking with Eugene, 73, you'll hear that phrase. It's his way of underscoring something he's said. He uses it to make a point: "When I went drinking, I gave the term 'binge' a whole new meaning. Simple as that." Or "If it weren't for The Union Mission, I'd be dead. Simple as that."

Of course, Eugene's life story isn't "simple as that." But despite his experiences, he's glad they led him to the Mission...and a shot at new life.

AN ADDICTIVE PERSONALITY

Eugene grew up in a fatherless home in "the ghetto" of East St. Louis. But he was a happy kid, showered with love by his single mom, who worked two jobs to support the family.

At Assumption High, an all-boys Catholic school, Eugene was one of just eight black students out of 1,200. He was on the football and track teams, and says his coaches "took me under their wing" and "gave me one-on-one attention and taught me values that assisted me in life."

During college, Eugene felt the calling to become a cop. He served on the East St. Louis police force, where he "saw everything, even some things I didn't want to see." When he hung up his badge after 12 years, he was looking for something new. His sister had married a Navy guy and said, "Come to Norfolk! There's hardly ever any snow here."

Eugene worked at a shipyard for a while before going into the hotel industry. He was married for a decade, but after he retired, he lived alone. He'd always been a social drinker, but depression over his mother's death pushed him to the throes of alcoholism. "Just one or two beers—that's wasting my time. If I couldn't go

"The Union Mission put me on a new mission: Think before you act. Remember what got you here. Don't repeat your old mistakes. A little prayer helps a lot. Simple as that."

with three 6-packs or a case, ain't no point.... I would even throw in a couple bottles of wine." Eugene would get to the liquor store 10 minutes before it opened at 7:00. "I'd drink all day—and sometimes all night." He had his share of fights and DUIs, and one night while intoxicated, he fell and fractured a few ribs. As he recovered in the hospital, "I said, 'I can't continue like this.' I got sick and tired of being sick and tired. Simple as that."

CALLED BY HIS NAME

Someone in rehab recommended he try The Union Mission, and it wasn't long before Eugene realized there was something very special about the place. "On my first day here, they remembered my name," he says. "I'd only been here a few hours and somebody called me by name. That means a lot!"

He was reminded that God knew his name, too. Eugene says being here rekindled his faded faith. "I believed in God," he says, "but only prayed when there was something really desperate, like, 'Lord, please just get me past this, and I won't do it again.' Then when things got better...well, there you go."

But "I've learned to submit to God," Eugene says, crediting the Mission's "phenomenal" staff with helping him in that process. "They will work with you as long as you're willing to be worked with."

"You can't fool them," he continues. "They've seen it all. And some of them have been through what I've been through.... That's what I like about them. Simple as that."

Eugene "walked the line" here at the Mission, saved up his Social Security, and was able to move into a TBRA apartment. He loves living independently again. And he's confident he'll maintain his sobriety—thanks to the Mission and his dependence on God. "I'm going to make it this time. I have nothing to hold me back."

"I thank God for The Union Mission," he says. "Without them, I'd be dead, on the streets. Simple as that."

Join Our Team: Caring Like Christ



ROSALYN MANNING

HOSPITALITY MANAGER / WOMEN'S SHELTER

“Caring like Christ in my position at The Union Mission Ministries means I work like I believe that all work matters to God. My desire is to demonstrate that in the way I handle my daily activities. This foundation means we care about our guests, coworkers, donors, and support teams by praying and making a difference together.”



TRUDY RAINS

DONOR RELATIONS COORDINATOR / ANCHORS OF HOPE

“So many people here in our community need to feel all the things that Christ showed to everyone: an abiding love, concern, compassion, tenderness, and kindness. Our spiritual foundation reaches the minds and hearts of all we encounter. Our donors feel they are caring like Christ when they help His hurting children by helping The Union Mission. People trust us to be good stewards of their hard-earned money and to love what we do and how we do it. God is here and it shows!”



REV. RAYMOND EVANS

RESOURCE RELATIONS MANAGER / BASHFORD MEN'S SHELTER

“It's impossible to care like Christ if you're not aware of the Scriptures. Everything that we do here at The Union Mission, primarily for our homeless guests, should reflect what they teach regarding how we are to minister to those in need. And 'Caring like Christ' here is exactly what the Bible says in Matthew 25:35 and Luke 4:18.”



JODY KYSLINGER

DONOR RELATIONS ASSISTANT

“Caring Like Christ [means] looking at each day, each moment through a heavenly perspective, asking the Lord to guide my thoughts, my words, my actions, and my attitude. We need to love others—our shelter guests, donors, and coworkers—as if they were Jesus. I try to remind myself of this every day when I reach out to our donors by phone, note, or email.”



DAKOTA BOWLEY

DIRECTOR / CAMP HOPE HAVEN

“Christ is absolutely at the center of everything we do at Camp Hope Haven. We cannot disconnect what we say we believe and how we live. It's good to have fun games and crazy activities, but if we fail to demonstrate the love that God has for the campers, we really aren't doing much. I want them to make memories they'll never forget, but mostly I want them to remember their time here and say, 'Those people loved me and showed me Jesus.'”

Come work with us!

If you're looking for meaning beyond the mundane, maybe you should work for The Union Mission Ministries! We're hiring both shelter and ministry support staff at the Mission, and summer staff for Camp Hope Haven.

Learn more about our current positions or apply online at:

[unionmissionministries.org/
job-opportunities](https://unionmissionministries.org/job-opportunities)

[hopehavenvb.org/
summer-staff-opportunities](https://hopehavenvb.org/summer-staff-opportunities)

Help a Former Shelter Guest Start a New Life Without Homelessness With Our Spring Volunteer Project!



It's expensive to move into your own apartment, so packing a

Home Tote is a huge help to those who are moving into permanent housing. They include many basic kitchen, bath, laundry, and cleaning supplies, making them a perfect housewarming gift.

Each Home Tote costs about \$100 to \$125 to fill with all the items on the shopping list. They're a great project for families, youth groups or Scouting troops, Sunday school classes, Bible studies, or church cell groups.

For our easy packing checklist, see

[unionmissionministries.org/
get-involved/drives](https://unionmissionministries.org/get-involved/drives)

If you can participate, please let us know at volunteer@ummnorva.org.



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NORFOLK, VA 23502
757-627-8686



Thank you for Your Generosity!



REV. JOHN W. GRAY, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



From hunger to hope... It all starts with a meal!

You can provide physical and spiritual nourishment this Easter and beyond
for just \$2.94 per meal.

For about \$75, you can help 25 men and women feel the love of Christ through a hot, hearty holiday meal.

And our emergency shelter guests receive so much more than food.

Here at The Union Mission, homeless neighbors in need find a safe haven and a warm bed, clean clothes, life-skills training, wellness support, counseling, housing assistance, and Christian staff who truly care. Your generous financial support gives them the opportunity to discover a better—and perhaps even eternal—life.

**Give generously today
and transform lives!**

unionmissionministries.org/Easter

Resurrection Sunday is quickly approaching! This holy day gives every Christian cause to thank God that Jesus “was handed over to die because of our sins” and to celebrate that “He was raised to life to make us right with God” (Romans 4:25), and give us eternal life with Him.

But for many of our homeless neighbors in Hampton Roads, Easter does not feel like a day for gratitude, let alone joy. It’s no holiday—it’s just another day to scrape by, to struggle to survive. For those living from couch to couch, hiding at night in their car, or gritting out a hard life on the streets, they’re concerned with finding a safe place to sleep, escape the weather, and even just find their next meal.

Their journey to hope often begins with that first meal here at The Union Mission. By meeting our homeless guests’ most basic physical and emotional needs, and by genuinely caring like Christ, they open their hearts to spiritual truths and the hope that we’ve found: the eternal hope that is found only in a relationship with Jesus.

Because you care, because you pray, and because you give so faithfully to our ministry, our shelter guests move from dejection and despair, and they find a brighter future—full of help and true hope. **Your generosity** truly makes a difference in real people’s lives! Thank you for having a heart for your homeless neighbors and remembering them in this holy season.

In His service,

Rev. Gray, I want to help the guests in your shelters resurrect hope!

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.

03-2024

Last Will and Testament

A Breath of Fresh Heir



It's the stuff of melodramatic tension in books, movies, and TV commercials: What money or personal possessions are at stake, who's named in the will to inherit these valuables, and who gets nothing. While most estate plans aren't nearly that exciting, there have been some unusual bequests.

You may remember the late billionaire Leona Helmsley. Though "The Queen of Mean" actually left most of her fortune to a charitable trust when she died in 2007, she made posthumous headlines when her will left \$12 million to her beloved Maltese—and excluded two of her four grandchildren, who were none too pleased. The pampered pooch named Trouble lived in luxury for the rest of her life, to roughly age 84 in dog years.

Examples like this illustrate a larger point: your estate plan is less about who gets what and more about what's important to you. Your will is one of the best ways to communicate with your loved ones about your faith in God and the values you hold dear. It's Psalm 78:4 in action—

"We will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about His power and His mighty wonders."

Here are two ways you can get started:

Write a Legacy Love Letter, or ethical will.

Consider this a cover letter for your estate plan. It outlines guiding principles, stories of your personal faith, and your future wishes for your family.

Include a gift in your will to The Union Mission Ministries.

An in-will gift makes your priorities to help those in need clear and it helps us continue to improve the lives of homeless neighbors in our community.

Your will is the ultimate opportunity to share what's most important to you. Make the most of it!

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, national origin, or disability unless it is beyond the scope of our care.

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 those experiencing homelessness 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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