

MTM *newsletter*

Demonstrating compassion to individuals
and families this Christmas.

+ Exciting Updates:
Tiny Homes, Season
of Hope 2023,
and the Art &
Experience Auction

Red has been
sober for seven
months!

December 2022

"I know that God loves me. He's a very good God and has taken care of me my whole life. Everything is possible now through Him."

Red

Red* recalls his traumatic family story with exacting detail.

Born in Kalamazoo, he lived in the Gun Lake area with his mom, dad, and older brother until he was two years old. The family then moved to Irons, Michigan and had a very violent marriage. According to Red, his parents drank, did drugs, and often tried to kill each other. By the time he was six years old, Red had a younger brother, his parents were divorced, and his mom was seeing someone else in the Detroit area.

"I lived with my mom and stepdad in a mobile home until I was nineteen. My brothers were both gone. My mom turned my little brother in for doing things he shouldn't have been, so he was a ward of the state, and my older brother took off," he said.

Meanwhile, Red's mom continued to drink. His stepdad was also an alcoholic who drank up a gallon of vodka daily. Red rode his bike outside all day, often riding up to 40-50 miles until he came home after dark in order to "stay out of their way."

"I was always scared of my mom – she was tough. I knew how abused



she was and what she could take, so I was afraid. I was hit by her and my stepdad with a belt frequently," he said.

The first time Red married was at age twenty-two. "My big heart got me in trouble. I wanted to be loved and I had an instant family. It was me, my wife, and her daughter, who was three when we got married."

That marriage lasted four years. Red remarried and had two sons by the time he was thirty. Everything was good in the beginning, but "I had my bouts with alcohol during that marriage," he said.

Today, Red's sons, General (15) and Gavin (14) live with their mom and her husband.

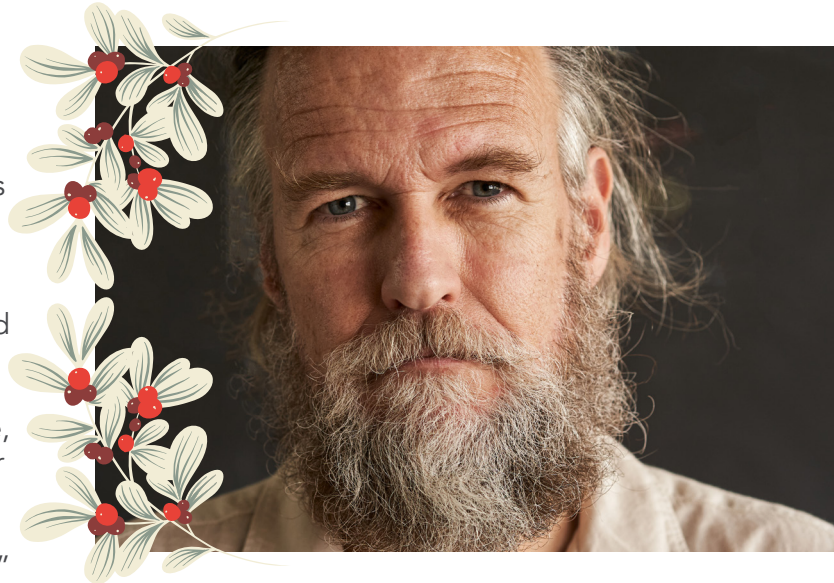
"I just got to see them last weekend," he said. "I haven't seen my oldest in five months and it's been even longer since I saw my baby boy."

"I always had a job. I'm not the guy who doesn't take care of my children or things in life, because I didn't have that. I didn't have a dad, he was absent, so I refuse to let my boys grow up without me."

Red taught his boys how to shower, ride bikes, and do other life things he had to learn on his own.

"My boys are strong. We go camping and to shows and on walks—we love being outside."

According to Red, that's why it was so easy for him to choose to stay on the streets when he became homeless.



April of 2022 was the first time he began experiencing homelessness.

"I was working at an Engineering Company and had been there for six years. But in April, I went on a bender and drank nonstop. I didn't even know why. Now I know it was because I was depressed."

Red lost his job and, in turn, his housing.

With no place to live and no family or friends to turn to, Red entered the Step-Up addiction recovery program at Mel Trotter Ministries in May. He received an internal referral for the Momentum workforce development program shortly thereafter and recently graduated.

*To read the rest of Red's inspiring story of recovery and healing please visit our website:



Upcoming Events for 2023!

2023 Art & Experience Auction

Mel Trotter Ministries is excited for our second annual Art & Experience Auction on Thursday, March 23, 2023. The Art & Experience Auction has two components: an online silent auction that culminates at the event, and a live auction at the event. The A&E Auction celebrates and highlights local artists and experiences in our community, including our own MTM guests. All funds raised will benefit the Art Therapy program at MTM which provides a safe and healing place for vulnerable members of our community to express themselves. Scan the QR code to register today!



Find us on social media for stories, videos, and upcoming events!

Save the Date for Season of Hope 2023!

season of hope

Thursday, October 5, 2023

Keynote Speaker:
Shane Claiborne



Shane Claiborne is a prominent speaker, activist, and best-selling author. Shane worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and founded The Simple Way in Philadelphia. He heads up Red Letter Christians, a movement of folks who are committed to living “as if Jesus meant the things he said.” Shane is a champion for grace which has led him to jail advocating for the homeless, and to places like Iraq and Afghanistan to stand against war. Now grace fuels his passion to end the death penalty and help stop gun violence.

Shane’s books include *Jesus for President*, *Red Letter Revolution*, *Common Prayer*, *Follow Me to Freedom*, *Jesus, Bombs and Ice Cream*, *Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers*, *Executing Grace*, his classic *The Irresistible Revolution*, *Beating Guns*, and his newest book, *Rethinking Life* (to be released in Feb 2023). He has been featured in a number of films including “Another World Is Possible” and “Ordinary Radicals.” His books have been translated into more than a dozen languages. Shane speaks over one hundred times a year, nationally and internationally. His work has appeared in *Esquire*, *SPIN*, *Christianity Today*, *TIME*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, and he has been on everything from Fox News and Al Jazeera to CNN and NPR. He’s given academic lectures at Harvard, Princeton, Liberty, Duke, and Notre Dame.

Shane speaks regularly at denominational gatherings, festivals, and conferences around the globe.

Moving The Needle On Homelessness



Mel Trotter Ministries and Next Step of West Michigan, a division of MTM, are excited to announce our next initiative in battling homelessness in our community. Earlier this fall, the Grand Rapids City Commission approved Mel Trotter Ministries proposal to begin work on Hope Village, a mixed-use development that will include tiny homes, apartments, and community space. This community will be located on Garden Street SE in the Madison Square neighborhood.

Homelessness continues to be a growing challenge in Kent County. "This is really important to the community and to the work that we do, because in Grand Rapids we have the resources necessary to start sending the needle backwards on homelessness," shares Dennis Van Kampen, Mel Trotter's president and CEO. "But the key to that is about truly affordable housing and giving people the opportunity to leave homelessness and even get into home ownership." The goal for the tiny house development is to help provide affordable housing during this housing crisis and provide individuals with a dignified space they can call their own. To learn more visit meltrotter.org.



At MTM, we are on a mission this Christmas season, just as we are every day throughout the year: to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus to anyone experiencing hunger and homelessness. As believers, it is especially important we take time to reflect upon why Jesus came to this earth, and what that demonstration truly means to us.

The word advent means "coming." During this time of year, we focus on the significance of the coming of the Son of God into the world. And the spirit of our celebration should be the spirit in which he came, summed up in Luke 19:10: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The coming of Jesus was a search-and-save mission. We endeavor this in our work here at MTM. Just as Jesus was on a mission to save the lost (i.e., those who do not know him), we are on a mission to help those without homes.

Thus, Advent is a season for thinking about the mission of God to seek and to save lost people from the loneliness of not knowing

Jesus. It's a season for cherishing and worshipping this characteristic of God—that he is an active God, one who is searching and saving and, on a mission, rather than being aloof or passive or indifferent. God is never in status quo mode, coasting or drifting. He is sending, pursuing, searching, saving. That's the meaning of Advent.

The book of Acts is a celebration of God's advent heart, one on the move to seek and to save. It's a narration of Jesus's ongoing advent into more and more peoples—all peoples—of the world. Acts is the story of how the early church understood the words, "As the Father has sent me, so even I am sending you" (John 20:21). It is the story of

how the vertical advent of an active God in the mission of Jesus stretches out and becomes the horizontal advent of Jesus in the mission of the church. And in us.

Jesus came into the world at the first Advent, and every Advent since is a reminder of his continual advent into more people's lives. Those with homes and those without. Those with easy upbringings and those who have only known trauma. People who have witnessed rejection and hurt and loss—kind of like Jesus.

May Jesus' continual advent into the lives of more individuals be our advent—our coming, our actionable moving into the lives of those around us in need of light and love.

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meltrotter.org/give



What is *compassion?*

From the President/CEO

Our mission statement at Mel Trotter Ministries is to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus Christ through rescue and restoration for anyone experiencing hunger or homelessness. What is true compassion? What does the compassion of Jesus look like? I think the Christmas season offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on these questions.

The story begins with God and his love and compassion for us. In the book of John, we discover that God loves us so much he sent Jesus. Notice God is not angry toward us; he loves us. Notice that God's gift of Jesus is not conditioned upon whether we deserve it or have made all the right choices or are even living in a certain way. Rather God loves us—and gives Jesus. As we seek to demonstrate true compassion toward our guests, we too must start with love. Unconditional love, including the unlovable. Because the truth is we are also at times unlovable.

As we read of the way Jesus lived on earth, we find he often demonstrated compassion. In Matthew 14 and 15, twice we are told that Jesus had compassion for the crowds who were hungry and needed him. Notice Jesus did not say to the crowd, "You

are hungry...why didn't you bring food? That would have been the responsible thing to do." Instead, Jesus had compassion for them, so he ministered to them and gave them food. Time after time in the gospels we read that Jesus had compassion for the sick, the blind, the hungry, and the outcast. So should we.

How should we react when we encounter someone who is hurting, hungry, panhandling, or living on the streets? If we follow the example of Jesus, we should engage with love and compassion—not contempt, judgement, or indifference.

However, this is not to say that Jesus left people the way he found them. There is no compassion in leaving someone to live on the streets or in someone's doorway without boundaries and accountability.

There is a story about Jesus encountering a man who was paralyzed and laid on a mat in the same place for 38 years. 38 years! Imagine how that man must have looked and smelled. Jesus does not throw him some coins and a loaf of bread and walk away. He does not walk around the man with scorn and judgement. Instead, he asks the man a question: "Do you want to get well?" I bet no one ever

asked him that question before. We could read this as a harsh or insensitive question by Jesus, but I don't think it is. I think Jesus and his tone was filled with love and compassion. Do you want to get well? The man says yes. Jesus tells him to get up, pick up his mat and walk. His healing begins and ends with love and compassion.

I think the answer to the question about what true compassion looks like is found in the story of Christmas. God loved us exactly as we were. He gave us Jesus so we could have life now and forever. He gave us Jesus to show us how to live. All of this done with love and compassion. True compassion meets people exactly where they are and cares too much about the people to leave them as they are.

In the book of Colossians Chapter 3, Paul writes, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." May we, this Christmas season, clothe ourselves with the compassion of Jesus Christ and demonstrate it to all we encounter.

Grace and peace,



"...True compassion meets people exactly where they are and cares too much about the people to leave them as they are. "

Dennis Van Kampen, President/CEO



Dennis Van Kampen
President/CEO
Mel Trotter Ministries

