

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO START A RESCUE MISSION?

Editor's Note: One of the goals of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions is to start new ministries that do not have an evangelical witness among the homeless. We are currently working with about 40 missions that are in the start-up phase. We recently asked five mission directors who have experienced mission start-up what the process entails: Michelle Porter – Regina Rescue Mission, Regina, SK; Paul Spence – Crossroads Center, Hastings, NE; Tom Beatty – Panhandle Rescue Mission, Gordon, NE; Gary Steward – Hope Gospel Mission, Eau Claire, WI; and DuWayne Sipper – The Path of Citrus County, Inverness, FL. This is only a sampling of their answers. The complete text is available at: www.agrm.org/

How do you know that God is calling you to start (or re-start) a mission?

Paul - It took me less than ten minutes to realize that this was God's calling for me. It wasn't the building, the board president, or even the staff that I was drawn to; it was the people. I saw their plight and wanted to help.

Gary – Do your research. Conduct informational interviews with leaders of the community in government, non-profit, and the business sector. Find out what the need is in the community. Visit every social service (Christian and secular) to learn what they do and how they do it. Don't judge them for serving...just observe and learn. Finally, through every step pray that God reveals His plan for you.

DuWayne - In my case, I woke up one morning with a burning desire to donate some time at a homeless shelter. After a couple of calls, I found our local sheriff's dept and he chuckled and said, "When you get one started, let us know". I pondered this question for a week and firmly decided that this was how I wanted to served the Lord and get purpose in my Life.

What are the critical elements in getting a mission started?

Michelle – Faith... seems obvious, but there are times of extreme discouragement and “what-the-heck-are-we-doing-here moments.” The enemy will try and stop you at every turn and when you aren't secure in your calling.

Tom - Without reservation, God's call is the most critical element. In all three places, knowing with certainty that God was the One behind the idea, we knew we couldn't fail.

Gary – I recommend you think long term. The trap is to only think about what it takes to open. Honestly, opening a mission will not mean much if you don't have the funds to pay the worker worth his wages and the electrical company to keep the lights on. Invest a great deal of energy researching what it will take to operate your future organization.

How did you select the city in which you started your mission?

Gary – I live there.

Michelle - The Association of Gospel Rescue Missions had asked us to do a needs assessment. The word from other agencies and Christians we met was, "Come! We need a long-term Christian recovery program!"

Tom - We were invited to start a mission in each of the cities where we have served.

How do you get the community to support your ministry while it is still a "vision?"

Michelle – We approached churches and Christians in Regina and we all got busy fixing the building (a former "crack-house) God gave us; cleaning, painting, removing needles and bug infested mattresses, serving soup, and, of course, starting Bible studies. People were excited, word spread quickly, and churches began coming to US to offer help.

Tom – I took advantage of every opportunity to speak to anyone who would stand still long enough to listen to me.

Gary – First, you must have a clear vision. Then "press the flesh." Meet with the community's leaders from all areas: business, churches, government, other social service agencies, etc. Share your vision and ask people to join you.

How do you build a strong financial base for your work?

Michelle – At first, we mailed every human being on the planet that we had known or met once. If I got the business card of my dry cleaner, he went on the mailing list. I think we actually sent our first couple of letters to 700 people! We did not nag anyone. I think we sent out to them twice, and only kept on the list those who responded.

Tom - I gave literature to everyone I talked to; explaining Rescue Ministry, the programs, policies, and opportunities for them to be involved, to pray for us and help as volunteers and donors, both gifts-in-kind and financial.

At speaking engagements, I had a "sign-up list" for those interested in being on our mailing list. From a local newspaper, I obtained a list of all other local newspapers and their circulation numbers, then we ordered newspaper inserts. Whenever I could, I obtained church directories and entered them into the database.

Paul – I encourage all staff to join a service club (the mission usually pays for the membership). We attend local meetings and play our part in consortiums and continuums of care (taking a leadership role if available). I offer my services to fill the pulpit if pastors need a week off.

DuWayne – Volunteers are used for everything from running our banquet, doing large yard sales, helping with the clients, folding newsletters and sorting at the store. We couldn't minister without them.

When do you know that you have “turned the corner” and that your mission is going to be successful?

Michelle – We always gauged success on the 5-year mark. As in business, most businesses that stick around 5 years will be successful. However, God will raise up a ministry in HIS time and for HIS purposes.

Paul – In my opinion, we "turned the corner" when we moved into our new building in June of 2005. We finally have the staff, the facility, and the resources to provide for the ministry

Gary – I don't ever want to “turn the corner.” To me, “turning the corner” implies complacency. We should never be satisfied with work we are doing, thus we should always be looking to ways

of improving our processes and programs. Remember we are working for the Lord. He wants our best. In this world, we will never achieve what we are created for, but we can always continue to reach.

Tom – God has not called us to results. He has called us to faithfulness.

What are the personal sacrifices involved in starting a new ministry?

Michelle – You sacrifice everything. Not to scare you away, but you better be ready to give every single thing you have to God. Time. Money. Health. Don't do it if you have a rocky marriage. Don't do it if you think your children will turn wayward. Don't do it if you're afraid of losing anything at all. It's not a Cruise Ship, people, it's a Battle Ship!

Gary – When we started Hope Gospel Mission it was just the three of us: Me, Myself, and I. To undertake this endeavor you must have your priorities in order: God, Family, and Church must come first. The work of the ministry is FOURTH on your priority list. Get these out of order and your life will fall apart. Also your family must be 100% committed to the ministry, remember they will be sacrificing as well.

DuWayne – I personally knew I must give up everything and I did. But being consumed by this mission was painful pleasure. Looking back at the blessings, the sacrifices look real small.