

The State of the Heart

Staff Grows to Provide New Services

By Chip Partner and Kathleen Tranelli

Our 40th anniversary year is an exciting time for Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach, as we open 20 new units of supportive housing on Thurston Road and plan for more new housing in the future. In this newsletter we profile two new staff members — Damond Wilson and Joey Stephens — along with two veteran staff members promoted to new roles — Lisa Buscemi and Sharon Castronovo — as the outreach grows to support more homeless men and women on the journey from incarceration to rejoining the community.



Damond Wilson, director of case management at Thurston Village apartments, explains how the project is a win for the men and women of SCPO, and for tenant advocacy across the community. See page 10.

What's Inside

Meet the Staff.....	1-4
Executive Director's Update.....	5
Jennifer House News.....	6
Nielsen House News.....	7
A Win at Thurston Road.....	10
.....	
Gratitude for Grants.....	4
Wish Lists.....	6
New Books.....	9, 11
SCPO Board of Advisors.....	12

Lordy, We're Forty! SCPO Ruby Anniversary Gala

See article on this page, and visit:
spirituschristiprisonoutreach.org
 for event details or to purchase tickets.



What's 40 Years Old & Red All Over? Our Ruby Anniversary!

There's no place like Jennifer House and Nielsen House, so click your ruby slippers together and transport yourself to the Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach spring gala—Saturday, March 28, from 6 to 10 p.m. in the Harro East Ballroom.

Everyone is encouraged to wear red as we celebrate SCPO's ruby anniversary—40 years of visiting men and women who are incarcerated and journeying with them as they re-enter the community.

As always there will be great food, fun conversation, and moving stories shared by some of the people we serve. Terrific prizes will be auctioned to support the ministry, and D.J. Chuck Argento will play tunes to get everyone dancing.

The suggested donation is \$40 per ticket this year, and anniversary sponsorships are available.

Please visit spirituschristiprisonoutreach.org for details.

Finally a Believer

*Lisa Buscemi, house manager,
Jennifer House*

When **Lisa Buscemi** learned about the house manager opening at Jennifer House, she said to herself, "I deserve this!" What a long way she had come, finally believing in herself. She took over as house manager in November.

Lisa's love for the women of Jennifer House is deep. She is well-equipped for the role, having fought through the same addiction and challenges the women face, gaining counseling and advocacy skills along the way.

She has a long history with Jennifer House. Lisa was a three-time resident, but the staff—in particular our current house director, Sarah Lee—never gave up on her. During her third stay, starting in May 2017, Lisa realized that the missing piece was her Higher Power. Once she realized that someone else had been watching over her, present all the way, she says, "Everything just clicked." She finally became able to believe in herself, and that made all the difference.

Lisa worked hard on her recovery, attending a support group and cutting off anything that got in the way. That includes cutting off ties with her son when he is using drugs, because the influence is too great. She realized that "anything that gets in the way of recovery, I will lose anyway."

After months of hard work, Lisa graduated from Jennifer House and moved in to Frederick Douglass apartments. She became a per-diem case manager at Jennifer House in January 2018, filling in at times for the previous house manager. She also became a Certified Recovery Peer Advocate, working in Delphi Rise's Open Access program to help those with substance abuse issues find appropriate treatment, and she supervised teams of women in the Healthy Sis-



ters program of Catholic Family Center, packaging soups and selling them at various events.

This summer, she will begin taking classes to become a Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor.

Jennifer House helped save Lisa's life, and she wants to do that for others. Just as Sarah Lee did not give up on her, Lisa intuitively knows when she should not give up on someone at Jennifer House. She worked for six weeks with a woman who wanted to sleep all day, rather than face her issues and at-

tend the appointments and programs arranged for her.

Refusing to accept the woman's myriad excuses, Lisa found a way to motivate her. The woman is now doing the work. "It is just great to have the feeling that you have helped someone," Lisa says.

As House Manager, Lisa has a positive working relationship with her former parole officer, who makes referrals to the Jennifer House program. What a long way she has come, indeed, and what a role model she is for the women she serves.

Wearing Many Hats

Sharon Castronovo, business manager

Sharon Castronovo became an indispensable part of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach almost by accident.

Fifteen years ago, as the younger of the family's two children entered kindergarten, Sharon was interested in taking on some part-time work. She'd enjoyed a successful career as a placement specialist for temporary staffing agencies before taking time with her kids, so a return to that field would be the natural move.

Then Sharon heard about SCPO from her mother-in-law, who had a friend doing

volunteer clerical work for the outreach. The friend began spending winters in Florida as the needs of the outreach were growing, and Jim Smith decided to create a paid position for a part-time administrative assistant. Sharon took the job, working 11 hours a week for the organization which then had an annual budget of \$245,000.



As SCPO has grown to serve more homeless men and women re-entering the community after incarceration, the administrative needs of the outreach have grown with it. Sharon's work week expanded from 11 hours to 20 hours to full-time. Her job title advanced from administrative assistant to grants manager, and she was recently promoted to business manager, overseeing a budget expected to reach \$1.5 million next year.

The demands of Sharon's job have matched the growth of the Castronovo children. Sharon and Peter's daughter Nicole is a school psychologist for the Palmyra-Macedon district, and son Justin is a junior at SUNY Oswego.

As all who work with Sharon will attest, no single job title describes everything she does to help SCPO grow and succeed. Functionally, she is the organization's CFO, HR director, payroll manager, government liaison and grant administrator. "It's a very rewarding place to work," Sharon says. "I've been here forever, and still every day is different."

Recently she has taken on a new role, with housing administrator Joey Stephens—overseeing rent payments and financial assistance for more than 50 men and women supported by SCPO in emergency, transitional, or permanent housing.

"We never wanted to get into the rental management business, but that's where the need is and where the government funding is available," Sharon explains. Along with managing rent and financial support, she and Joey have taken on other roles to support the opening of Thurston Village—furniture buyers and interior designers for 20 newly renovated apartments, many of which feature unique and challenging floor plans.

"We're buying a lot of pots and pans and beds and couches of different sizes, and getting thank-you cards from places like Ruby Gordon," Sharon laughs.

A culture of acceptance, forgiveness, and transformation has kept Sharon fulfilled in her many roles at SCPO.

"We always say, 'This is where the magic happens.' Not a lot of people get to do as many unique, interesting, and rewarding things as I do," Sharon says. "I've grown during the time I've worked here, and I appreciate that. I could not do the work I do without amazing staff, dedicated volunteers, strong support from Spiritus Christi Church and clients ready to make a change."

Tapping New Skills

Joey Stephens, housing administrator

Joey Stephens is a quick learner. His appointment as housing administrator for SCPO is a testament to his ability to take on increasing responsibilities and "behind the scenes" projects to support the multi-faceted operations of SCPO.

Joey started in August 2018 after graduating from University of Rochester, in a part-time role 6 hours a week, which grew to 20 hours. Initially he helped to compile grant reports that document how awards are spent and demonstrate the impact of grants awarded to Jennifer House and Nielsen House.

He then wrote a policies and procedures manual for grants administration, creating a structure and process to manage the numerous public and private grants awarded to SCPO each year. Joey learned about SCPO's revenue sources, expenses and program budgets along the way, demonstrating initiative and project management skills.

"Whether the task was large or small," says business manager Sharon Castronovo, "Joey was great, and he was willing to take on more and more responsibility. We are lucky to have him."

As housing administrator, Joey's responsibilities include initial and periodic financial reviews of individual applicants for the Permanent Supportive Housing program, many of whom are graduates of Jennifer House and Nielsen House. Through interviews of each applicant about their income sources and expenses, Joey determines how much each applicant should contribute to the rent of units that otherwise are subsidized through government grants.

He conducts periodic follow-ups to confirm that the resident has a continuing need for support in accordance with grant guidelines, and whether there has been a change in public benefit or employment revenue. This enables Joey to engage in the "people side" of programming, as well as back-end operations.

Most recently, Joey has been managing the process of furnishing 20 units at the Thurston Village apartments, which opened



in late February. An Empire State Supportive Housing-Initiative (ESSHI) award includes money to equip the apartments with furniture, dishes and cooking supplies, and requires a certain amount to be spent on women and minority-owned businesses.

Joey researched and selected vendors, then worked with Sharon to manage the procurement process from ordering to delivery and payment. "It was exciting and gratifying to see it all come together as we got closer to the move-in date," he says.

Joey has always wanted to serve others, particularly those in poverty. While working for SCPO the year after his college graduation, Joey also worked as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer at Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Rochester. There, he developed a community profile on youth financial education and raised funds to support financial literacy programming.

This dovetailed nicely with the skills he was developing at SCPO. "I never expected to be on the 'business side' of social services," Joey says, "but it has been a great learning experience."

As the Permanent Supportive Housing program expands (from 18 units in early 2019 to 48 units by mid-2020), the administrative and operations needs have grown with it. Thank you, Joey, for your flexibility to tap unrealized skills to meet our needs.

A Dream of Advocacy

Damond Wilson, director of case management, Thurston Village

In 2015, **Damond Wilson** was 27 years old. A University of West Georgia graduate with a degree in business administration, he had a successful career in marketing and sales with Georgia companies.

"Then," he says with a smile, "life got interesting."

After going through a divorce, he was ready to make a radical change and try a new direction. Church has always been an important part of Damond's life, and he asked God to reveal what he should do next. But the answer seemed slow in coming.

Then, in January of 2016, Damond had a dream. He saw himself as a student on a college campus, with a particularly memorable building at the top of a hill. When Damond woke up, he wasn't sure where the campus was or what the dream meant—perhaps a sign that he should return to business school and earn an M.B.A.

The next month, Damond was reading a book about the life of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The book quoted King about his time as a student at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania—and something told Damond he should look that school up.

A quick online search later, he saw the building from his dream—at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School (CRCDS) in Rochester, which had merged with Dr. King's alma mater in 1970. Damond had never been to Rochester, but he called the school and liked what he heard about social justice. Three months later he had sold his house in Georgia and moved here as a divinity student.

In late 2019, as he was about to earn his degree, Damond learned from a CRCDS classmate—Rev. Myra Brown of Spiritus Christi Church—about a job opening at her church's prison outreach. After a series of interviews with SCPO staff and residents that felt right for everyone, he became director of case management for Thurston Village apartments in January.

"I'm trained as a minister, but ultimately I see myself in an advocacy role like I am now," Damond says. "I've always seen myself as an advocate, and dealing with a population that's been to prison and needs help to live on their own, I feel right at home."

As a newcomer to Rochester's network of social services and supports, Damond said he is receiving on-the-job training from Jon Olsen at Nielsen House, Sarah Lee at Jennifer House, and Eileen Hurley at Voter's Block apartments. "I love the fact that I work with people who are so patient and accommodating," Damond says. "They've made my work experience so much easier."

Asked the biggest challenge of serving 20 individuals and families who will move into Thurston Village this March and April, Damond said it's making sure to provide support that matches each person's unique situation.

"If a person isn't truly helped by what I'm doing, then the work I'm doing is in vain," Damond says. "People have different walks in life, and they will change when they're ready to change. My job is to listen carefully, even for the needs they're not saying, and get people the support that helps them to succeed."

A Nielsen House resident helped to confirm that he is in the right place. "One of the men told me, 'For everyone else this is a job. For you, this is a calling,'" Damond remembers with another big smile. "I truly believe that. I'll love to see what God has in store for me."



Gratitude For Grants

The Prison Outreach is grateful for the following gifts received or awarded since publication of the Fall/Winter 2019 newsletter:

Public

City of Rochester
Emergency Food and Shelter
National Board Program
Finger Lakes Performing Provider System
Monroe County
New York State Office of Temporary
and Disability Assistance
U.S. Department of Housing
and Urban Development

Private

Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation
ESL Charitable Foundation
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
Five Star Bank
Hanes 10th National Sock Drive
LGBT+ Giving Circle
Mother Cabrini Health Foundation
Rochester Women's Giving Circle
Schwab Charitable Donor-Advised Fund
Ticket 2 Ride, Rochester NY
United Way of Greater Rochester
Wilson Foundation
Wyman-Potter Foundation



Forty Years of Learning & Serving

Executive Director's Update

By Jim Smith

The year 2020 marks the 40th anniversary of the Prison Outreach!

When we started in 1980, in a crooked little house on Breck Street, the term “re-entry” was unheard of. Society’s mindset was that if a person struggled after release from incarceration, that was just part of the consequence of committing a crime.

Our church community was aware that there was another side to the story. We learned that sometimes, “hurt people” hurt people. We believed each member of our society was entitled to respect, dignity and forgiveness. Hence, we began Rogers’ House for homeless ex-offenders coming out of state prisons like Attica and Auburn.

As the staff resident in early days of the program, I had the privilege of living with and learning from the men of Rogers’ House. They have been my greatest teachers over the years. They taught me what a person does, and how society labels us, is not who we are. In order to walk with another person, we have to be able to step out of our comfort zones—to care, to listen, and to understand one another.

One day in the early 1980s, I was walking with John, who had been incarcerated for 23 years. He went to prison at age 16, came out when he was 39. John had grown up in the country, on a farm. I walked across Main Street and waited halfway for traffic to pass. In a panicked voice, John yelled, “Jim, Jim, wait for me!” He had not crossed a busy street in 23 years, and had little experience with city life from his childhood. I was fully unaware as to what John needed—clueless how even to walk beside him in a literal sense! God was patient with me and our community as we fumbled, fell down, got up, and learned over time how to live out our mission: “To visit men and women in prison and journey (walk) with them as they re-enter the community.”

Forty years later, society sees the value in re-entry—helping a person adjust from incarceration to society by providing housing,

structure, education, behavior modification, vocational training, and opportunity. We recognize that if a person is helped and does not commit new crimes, society becomes a little safer. Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach today is the lead agency in our community offering emergency housing, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent housing to homeless ex-offenders. We are an integral part of the Homeless Service Network in our community. By June of 2020, we will provide housing to 75 homeless ex-offenders on any given night.

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To help celebrate our 40th anniversary we have a new logo to share, which you may notice looks similar to that of Spiritus Christi Church. That is because Spiritus Christi gave birth to the Prison Outreach. It is because of the Church that we believe each person is created in the image and likeness of God. It is because of the Church that we

create a safe and diverse home by honestly loving the men and women we serve, without judging them. In doing so, we establish a trusting and healing environment.

Our staff and volunteers bring a spirit of joy and enthusiasm to this work. They consistently foster effective, honest, and open communication. We are committed to empowering the men and women we serve by allowing their voices to be heard, accepting them just as they are, and respecting where they are in life, while holding them accountable to reach their full potential. Lastly, we believe in servant leadership, which is achieved through consistently leading by example.

Today, most of the people at Jennifer House and Nielsen House come to us from jail instead of prison. Nearly all of them are homeless and suffer from substance abuse. However, we have kept the name “Prison Outreach.” This is because prison takes on many shapes and forms. As an alumnus of the Prison Outreach recently shared at our Thursday night Mass celebration, “My prison of addiction was far greater than a cell block, and today my freedom is from the bondage of addiction.” You will notice in our logo that Jennifer House and Nielsen House are bowed like a rooftop over the Prison Outreach. This is purposeful to represent the significance of safe housing, which is a critical foundation of our program. The names also remind us of the patron saints of the Prison Outreach. Jennifer House was named in honor of Jennifer Deas, a former ex-offender who ran our Rogers House restaurant and was part of the planning of Jennifer House before her untimely death.

Nielsen House was named to honor Maureen Nielsen, who loved the Prison Outreach, went into prison every Friday, and was the staff resident in our first women’s home. Sadly, Maureen was murdered in 2001, while in Haiti doing missionary work.

We know that both of these saints and angels, Jennifer and Maureen, are watching over us and ever-present as we celebrate this wonderful 40-year journey!



A Great Spring Forward

Jennifer House News

By Sarah Lee, Director

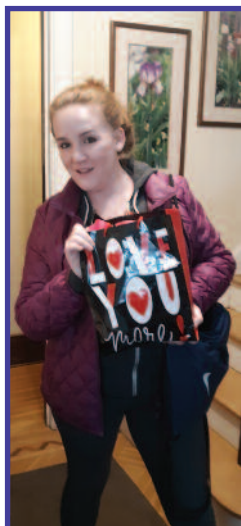
With the holidays past us the Jennifer House is off to a great spring forward. We are looking to spend sunny days in the parks, build community and spread love everywhere! Jennifer House is currently full with a bunch of great women who are truly focused on moving their lives forward and gaining independence. We are currently fully staffed as well, having just made two great additions to our per diem roster!

Jennifer House plans to spend the upcoming days practicing exercise, self-care, and recreation. We also look forward to attending our first concert sober, participating in water sports, and enjoying our annual picnics and celebrations. We are partnering

with the STAR Academy—a new program at the former Monroe Correctional Facility on East Henrietta Road that focuses on rehabilitating inmates and providing support services—to serve more men and women behind the walls.

We are also looking to expand Jennifer House services by accepting referrals from other counties and out-of-state. As the size and scope of SCPO services grows, we are seeing an increase in referrals from places outside the Rochester area. Jennifer House has been very supportive of moving women into our community and keeping them engaged as well.

Our team is working with interns who are excited to spread the good word about our outreach at the Ministry Fair. The students work diligently on presenting the ministry not only within the Spiritus Christi family, but also sharing it with others in the community. Lastly, Jennifer House looks forward to the annual GALA. We have a wonderful speaker who is excited to share her experience, strength, and hope.



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SCPO Wish List

Jennifer House

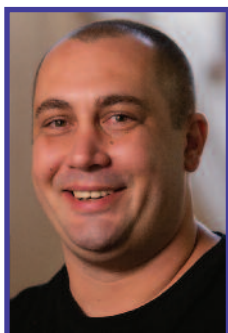
- New pots and pans
- Printer/copier for PC
- Camera
- Book shelf
- Recovery movies (DVD)
- Daily planners
- Journals, pens, pencils
- Purses/shoes
- Pajamas/robes/slippers
- Umbrellas
- Pillows/pillow cases
- Comforters and sheet sets (twin size)
- Towels (body and face)
- Women's socks, panties and bras
- Women's toiletries
- Walmart/Wegmans Gift Cards
(for food & gifts for women)

Nielsen House

- Hygiene supplies
- Towels
- Blankets
- Kitchen appliances
- Twin beds
- Furniture for residents' new apartments
- Notebooks / planners
- Men's clothing / shoes
- Love and prayers

Items can be dropped off at the houses or at the Spiritus Christi Offices, 121 N. Fitzhugh St. For more information call Jennifer House at 585-288-1074 or Nielsen House at 585-328-0801.

Thank you!



Happy Holidays & New Housing Opportunities

Nielsen House News

By Jon Olsen, Director

Winter is fully upon us as I reflect on the past few months and take a glimpse into the near

future. Our last newsletter described the exciting new apartments in the process of being completed at Charlotte Square on the Loop. Some of our men have since moved into their very own, newly constructed, beautiful apartments that they now call home. This opportunity not only motivates the men to stay focused on their goals; it also inspires newer residents of Nielsen House, because this could be a reality for them as well. Nielsen House recently toured the Thurston Village apartments during an open house. The men are excited to be a part of this new project with our outreach ministry.

Nielsen House operated at full capacity throughout the past year. We remain fully staffed and have incorporated alumni into a volunteer role covering our overnight shift. This proved to be beneficial not only for the outreach, but for our alumni as well. The volunteer position is a way for the men to stay connected with Nielsen House. It creates accountability and adds positive job history to their resumes. If they are still reporting to drug court, probation, or parole, it looks favorable that they are staying connected without being mandated to do it. This has been going smoothly and we plan to continue incorporating our alumni in serving current residents.

We had a busy holiday season again this year. Nielsen House hosted Jennifer House for our night of giving thanks. The staff and residents came together to enjoy a delicious meal. After socializing and dinner, the group formed a large circle and shared what they were thankful for. It was a powerful evening that unified the two houses as one big family. We thank Luther Knight and Susan Truesdell for all the extra love they put into the food that helped make this night such a success. The next week followed up with a full spread for Thanksgiving dinner, and our residents invited their families over to spend the day. It's encouraging when our residents' family members witness that

their loved ones are safe, sober, and able to smile. For some of our men it has been decades since they were able to experience a family dinner for the holidays.

Christmas season started with our annual Mass in the Park. It was a joyous evening full of love, compassion, and sharing. Our generous parishioners brought gifts for the children of our residents. This act of kindness is such a blessing for our men, alleviating the worry of how they're going to get a gift for their kids. Thanks to our parishioners and the shopping budget provided by Spiritus Christi, we were able to provide 14 residents, 16 chil-

Breaking down the barriers that have prohibited our men from obtaining permanent housing can be difficult, but their huge smiles make the hard work all worthwhile.

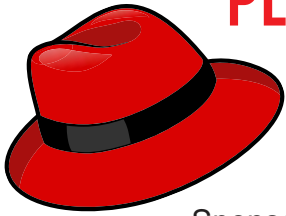
dren, and six alumni with presents for Christmas. This is one of my favorite times of the year at the house. Miss Betty Monahan, our recreational therapist, also came and provided gifts, including a game the men really enjoyed. The men were able to laugh and embrace the day with their children and families. Robert Lee, our House Manager, took the men to a Roaring 20s-themed New Year's Eve Party hosted by ROCovery Fitness. They also went to hear live music at a sober party that evening. Our men rang in the New Year clean and sober, having tons of fun!



Our staff has been working on getting our men ready for the apartments opening at Thurston Village. Breaking down the barriers that have prohibited our men from obtaining permanent housing can be difficult, but their huge smiles make the hard work all worthwhile. We're truly fortunate to have the ability to provide these beautiful apartments to men who have put in the work and proven they deserve this opportunity. It's a labor of love for me, and I'm truly fortunate to be in a position to help others capitalize on the same opportunity I received.

Nielsen House is looking forward to the spring season and our annual friends and family day on May 23rd at Seneca Park. Last year we hosted more than 150 friends, family members, and community supporters. This year we rented a lodge, anticipating another large crowd. Nielsen House is also in the process of obtaining funds to fix a structural issue and renovate our kitchen. The kitchen area has been sore spot in our beautiful home for many years, and we are eager to give it the attention it so desperately needs. We look forward to what's in store for the outreach and plan to have a blast at the upcoming Gala. We hope to see you all there!





PLEASE JOIN Our List of Sponsors for the Ruby Anniversary!



Sponsorships are available at \$2,000 (40 years x \$50), \$1,000 (40 years x \$25) and \$500 (40 years x \$12.50) levels. Please consider whether you, your company or other groups with which you are involved, might be willing to support this valuable ministry in return for valuable goodwill and publicity. Sponsors will be acknowledged at the event and in social media. Call Sharon Castronovo at 585-288-0504 for details.



Thank you to our current 2020 Gala sponsors

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If your employer participates in the United Way Donor Designation Program, you can direct your United Way contribution to the Prison Outreach by writing in the agency **ID#1384** on your pledge form. Just ask your Human Resources or Payroll department for a pledge form, or call the SCPO office at 288-0504 to request a donor designation card.

A Place Not of My Choosing:

Jim Smith and the Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach

By James Brady Callan

I wrote this new book to celebrate our prison ministry's 40th anniversary. It traces Jim's early call to ministry at Corpus Christi Church when Sister Margie Henninger asked him to serve the homeless. He fed and sheltered them in the church basement.

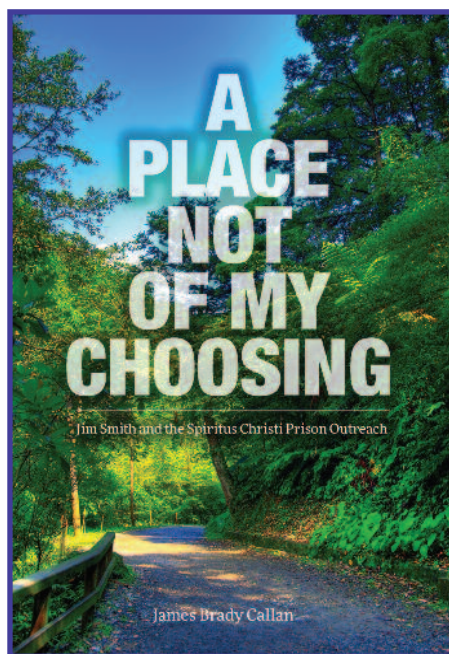
In 1980, he was asked to help form Rogers House, a residence for male ex-offenders. Later, he was invited to live there as staff resident. Soon he became the director at age 24.

Never one for the spotlight, Jim did not seek any of these roles. When asked, he responded with a yes, no matter how steep the challenge. He believed he was answering God's call, and that's what he wanted most in his life.

The book covers the Prison Outreach's expansion to five state prisons and the Monroe County Jail. It tells the history of Jennifer House and Nielsen House, as well as the development of the latest supportive housing initiatives around the city.

Included in the book are stories of dozens of people incarcerated or formerly incarcerated. Our volunteers, too, share their stories of how they got involved in the Prison Outreach.

The book will be available in March. There is no charge for the book, but donations are always welcome.



Father Jim Callan and Jim Smith, circa 1980, when Rogers House and the Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach were founded.



SPIRITUS CHRISTI PRISON OUTREACH STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR MISSION

To visit women and men who are incarcerated and journey with them as they enter the community

OUR VISION

The Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach is the lead agency serving the homeless ex-offender in the Monroe County area

OUR STRATEGY

1

Visitation to support men and women in jail or prison

2

Safe housing from highly supervised temporary homes to permanent housing

3

Case management to coordinate the treatment and services our residents need to live independently

4

Employment planning by providing access to the education, training and support they need to get good jobs

OUR GOALS FOR 2015-2020

Expand independent living options

Increase employment planning tools

Improve programming to teach life skills and support family reunification

Achieve financial sustainability for our mission

A Win for Tenant Advocacy

With 20 units of supportive housing, SCPO helps to rebuild a community at 447 Thurston Road

By Damond Wilson

Born out of the need for habitable living conditions, the apartments located at 447 Thurston Road became ground zero for tenant advocacy in Rochester. Tenants living in the apartment building partnered with local organizers at Rochester City-Wide Tenant Union and the City of Rochester to bring legal action against the previous landlord, Thurston Road Realty.

Before this action, tenants were exposed to appalling code violations such as insects and rodents, sewage back-up, electrical issues, inadequate heat, and more. One woman protested that the ceiling caved in on her children while they were sitting in the

Thurston Road Realty and initiated renovations in the spring of 2019.

The renovations were made possible by regulations requiring affordable rents, along with grants for supporting homeless individuals crafted by state lawmakers. The Governor's office explicitly supported the project by allocating \$10 million in state funds to gut and rehabilitate the distressed properties. A partnership between New York State, Home Leasing, and Community Preservation Corporation—a finance company for affordable housing and community revitalization—made it possible to create affordable housing in the city of Rochester for 63 individuals and families. At 447 Thurston Road, 20 units have set aside for individuals in need of supportive housing who are served by Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach.

The relationship between Home Leasing and SCPO may seem providential, due to the nature of advocacy surrounding our prison outreach. The history of the parent organization that gave birth to the Prison Outreach, Spiritus Christi Church, is

based on advocacy that led to separation from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester—the story of Father Jim Callan and how his advocacy for inclusion and women's rights led to the creation of a new church where all are invited to participate. This radical inclusion has permeated the ideology and conviction of Spiritus Christi ministries, to the point where advocacy and empowerment are a foundation of their missions. This sense of advocacy and empowerment fuels the Prison Outreach as we visit women and men in prison, then journey with them as they re-enter the community.

Within my first month of employment here, I can see that the work we do is more than counseling, housing, and support for individuals who fell on hard times. We are advocating to rebuild a community that eliminates the stigmas which perpetuate



family's apartment. These appalling and unacceptable living conditions, along with constant threats of eviction, inspired some tenants to take their concerns to the next level. They organized and advocated to change their dire predicament.

Change did come in the form of legal victory and transfer of property ownership. The tenant activists received a win when courts ordered the previous landlord to make repairs to the units and bring them up to code within 90 days. These repairs were ordered not only for the apartments at 447 Thurston Road, but also a second building at 967 Chili Avenue—a total of 63 units in all.

At this time Home Leasing, a family-owned Rochester company, expressed interest in buying and renovating the dilapidated properties. After intense negotiations, Home Leasing acquired both properties from



hate and discrimination. We are demonstrating that people deserve a second chance, and that opportunity is the only degree of separation that distinguishes those formerly incarcerated from those who aren't.

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The residents I interact with every day demonstrate that life hangs in the balance for everyone; each of us has the power to decide whether we are productive or destructive with our own life. One of our residents put it this way: He said your "clean date" doesn't necessarily have to mean free from drugs or alcohol, it can be "clean" from the things in life that prevent you from moving forward. He showed me that we all have the same fears and joys in life, forces that dictate our decisions and mandate our responses.

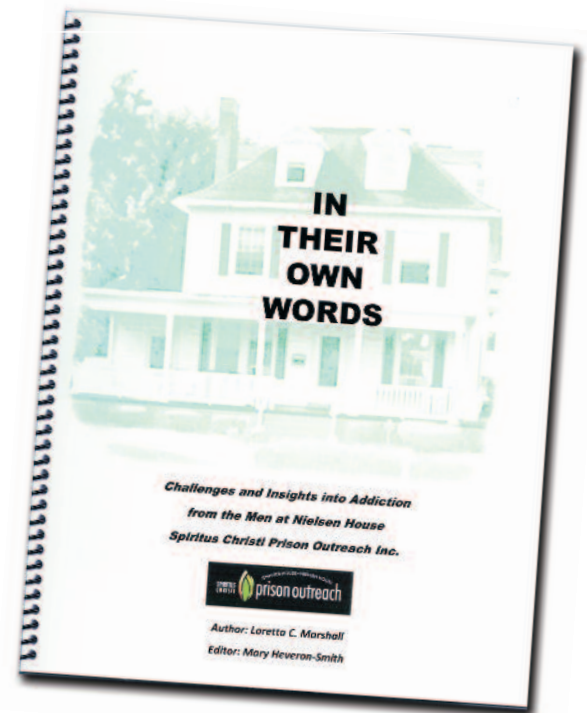
It has been a joy for me to walk with these individuals on their journey to recovery from past circumstances of life. It needs to be said that we all are recovering from something. The difference for our clients is that their actions have placed them on the wrong side of the law, potentially leading them on a path toward discrimination and homelessness unless they receive support.

In Their Own Words— Available March 2020

By Laurie Marshall

If you want to gain insight into the world of addiction, healing, and recovery, pick up a copy of this new mini-book. It shares thoughtful discernment from the men at Nielsen House—no one can say it better than the men themselves! It's a straight-forward and honest read, with responses from the men about their challenges, feelings, societal concerns and beliefs, and so much more.

Learn firsthand as the men heal; restore their minds and bodies with a healthier lifestyle; and allow their feelings to unfold. The gift they deliver to us as readers is profound as they articulate and share their stories.



Excerpt From the Overview

Names have been changed to respect confidentiality

Kevin shares what makes Nielsen House unique:

"Other rehab type houses may have staff that have more impressive degrees, but... without the hands-on knowledge. They may know about my disease, but they haven't lived my disease. They may never have lived in my darkness, nor have they come into the light. Without the experience of actual addiction, professionals may convey a sense of pessimism, resulting in my feeling put down."

He adds that people who seek help to overcome their addictions can feel they are never understood:

"We need to work with people who understand what we're living with. Here the staff members know what we are going through, because they have walked in our shoes."



To obtain a copy, call the
Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach
office at 585-288-0504

Quotes on Other Topics Discussed With the Men

Things I Enjoyed as a Child:

"Grey and cloudy days of spring and playing in the woods."

"Swimming in the summer."

"Just doing childish, innocent, fun things that kids do."

"Learning how to sew."

"The air show."

Challenges I Had Growing Up:

"I learned to condone violence."

"I had siblings that were mean to me."

"My parents were immigrants; I didn't fit in anywhere."

"My mom died when I was nine."

"I remember a lot of arguments and then my dad left. I got one postcard."

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Want A Speaker?

Are you looking for a speaker for your club, church or community group?

Do you know of another church or community group who might want to learn about the Prison Outreach or support its work?

We have dynamic speakers who are anxious to tell the community about the great work the Outreach is doing to help ex-offenders transform their lives. The stories are compelling and the reduced recidivism statistics are impressive.

All we need is a name and contact information; we'll handle the rest. Contact Jim Smith at 585-288-0504 for details or to schedule a speaker.

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