

AN ORTHODOX HOUSE OF REJUVENATION

“THERE SIMPLY AREN’T ENOUGH PLACES FOR SOBER LIVING IN OUR COMMUNITY,” SAID NATHAN SMITH, THE CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF FOCUS COLUMBUS’S JONAH HOUSE. COLUMBUS, OHIO, IS AN EPICENTER OF HEROIN ABUSE AND ADDICTION IN THE MIDWEST. THIS HEROIN EPIDEMIC HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY VISIBLE AS COMMUNITY AFTER COMMUNITY HAS SEEN SHARP INCREASES IN DEATHS CAUSED BY ABUSE OF THIS DANGEROUS DRUG.

“I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me.”
Jonah 2:2

Many people are battling every day to free themselves from their addictions, which addictions often lead to homelessness, poor health, and financial instability. Nathan recognized that Columbus has one of the best shelter systems in the country. Shelters, however, can be horrible places for anyone recovering from addiction. FOCUS Columbus’ Jonah House will fill the gap that currently exists in the service system for homeless addicts.

Opportunity Meets Desire

The Jonah House, which is slated to open in the fall of 2017, will provide a critical, transitional step for former heroin addicts to move from dependency to self-sufficiency. The house will be a safe, caring living space, and whose running it will also arrange meaningful, daily work for residents. In-house professional partners will help residents with their mental and physical health, and provide guidance for everyday tasks.

Nicholas Chakos, Executive Director of FOCUS North America, said, “The Jonah House will be bringing a credible solution to a dire need in Columbus. While FOCUS provides infrastructure and organization to centers around the country, the folks in Columbus have done all of the groundwork and are stepping up to impact their community meaningfully.”

The goal is for Jonah House residents to be able to focus entirely on themselves and their recovery for six months or a year. “There will be professional, volunteer, and spiritual help,” said Peter Gardikes, who is a Jonah House ministry team mem-

ber and Parish Council Member at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Columbus. “Ultimately, we’d like to see people who have gone through Jonah House mentor those who come after them. We’re creating a community of people supporting one another.” Jonah House is successfully engaging churches in central Ohio to create a network of support and opportunity for those who successfully complete the transition and leave the Jonah House.

Jonah As a Metaphor and Method

In the Old Testament story, Jonah experiences incredible turbulence on a boat as he attempts to flee God’s command. Jonah knows it is his fault that the other passengers are in danger – and he also knows that a change has to take place. Jonah admits to those onboard that he has disobeyed God. Like Jonah, those who are addicted thoughtlessly cause pain to those they love. Similarly, these individuals must come to realize this, and take steps to come back into harmony with those around them.

After being cast into the sea, Jonah enters the belly of the whale. In our case, this time is likened to a period of rehabilitation. When an addict, man or woman, is taken away from his storm and puts some distance between himself and the cause of his pain, he avoids harming himself and others. Just as Jonah emerged to deliver a saving message to the people of Nineveh, when the addict emerges, he is resurrected with the desire to contribute to a community and purpose greater than himself. The parallels are unmistakable.

Just as Jonah’s three days in the belly of the sea monster transformed the way Jonah acted as a messenger of God, FOCUS Columbus’s Jonah House will become a vehicle through which recovering addicts in the Columbus community discover their importance as individuals – and their ability transform others around them.

Please say a prayer for the Jonah House. If you wish to learn more and support this ministry, please contact FOCUS North America.



Nathan Smith is the director of the program