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→ **MINISTRY UPDATE** ←

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# UPDATE

Oh how great the mercies and the grace of our God! I get to experience it in my own life, but I also get to see it in action in the lives of others. I realize many church people are fearful of the men and women with whom I work. How do we know they won't fail and be what they used to be? Many even believe and teach that these people can't change. Since it is the Holy Spirit that changes people, that thinking might be an unforgivable sin. Other than blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, there is no sin God won't forgive. There are no sinners God won't save. In fact, he puts his greatest efforts into seeking all the lost, not just some of the lost.

Everything God is, says, and does, is for every individual, not just the good. Evil is always pursuing us and has no rules to follow. It takes on whatever form necessary to deceive and draw us away from God. When we are most sure we can stand, take heed, for it is very possible to fall. Nobody intends to fall or fail. We trip over things we don't see, even if they are obvious to others, but when we walk in the light of God, we see clearly and don't stumble.

Men and women at Hand Up have fallen hard, but God has helped them back up. He has made them His own children, heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ. He alone is their father, and He gives His grace and gifts to whoever He chooses. A life-long

good person could get jealous of God's great generosity (and I have seen it too much). Different people have different ideas about what should be forgiven. If the sin becomes too common and acceptable, they just make the sin lawful and tax it. Then another sin takes its place.

Personally, I'm glad God never changes. He doesn't take polls and consider politics. He never changes because traditions change or fads change or anything else in the world changes. I am so glad I can count on something being the same all the time. I'm not torn to and fro as things around me change. God is great and good all of the time. Because of Him, I am made holy and loved by Him.



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— David Nichols,  
Executive Director/  
President

A lot of people may not understand the value of Hand Up Ministries to those who come out of prison. Allow me, if you will, to try and communicate some of these values to you. The first and most obvious is "a place to go." Most men coming out of prison have lost everything they had before incarceration, including homes, family, connections, jobs, and, sometimes, even friends. There is a

stigma in society in general that causes people to not want anything to do with someone who has committed a felony. This sometimes even affects families, and sometimes even family members do not want contact with their own because of a felony conviction. Unless a man has been able to salvage his connections to friends or family or co-workers, he has no place where he can go to put a roof over his head. Because of this, the number of homeless people has skyrocketed in recent years. Hand Up Ministries offers men coming out of prison a place where they can put a roof over their head and work toward building a future and rebuilding their lives, as well as reestablishing those connections they have lost due to incarceration.

When coming out of prison, it is not always the case that a guy has no place to go. There are times when he has to make a choice concerning where he should go. Many times, family or friends are ready to help and provide a place to stay, but it is not a good environment. There may be drugs or alcohol on the premises or close by, or it may be a small town where there are former friends who are not a positive influence. Many guys come to Hand Up Ministries because it is the only available place to start fresh.

Hand Up Ministries is also a “safe place” for men coming out of prison. It is a sober living environment, which for most men is advantageous. Many of the men at Hand Up find it so safe and comfortable that they don’t even lock their vehicles or trailers. For me, it is like living in a small town where everyone pretty much knows everyone else, and they watch out for each other. Probation officers are generally very comfortable with offenders living at Hand Up because they know what we stand for, and they know where to find their probationers if the need arises.

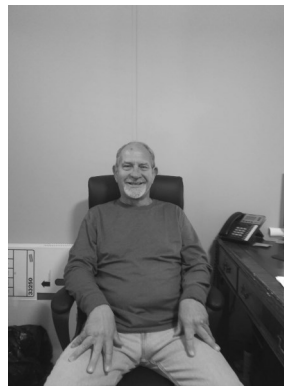
Another reason to choose Hand Up

is the fact that it is a cheaper place to live. Residents don’t have to worry about utilities or deposits, nor do they have to be worry about first and last months’ rent. Many apartments won’t rent to felons, especially if the offender has a sex crime in his past.

There is also support at Hand Ministries. Every resident is part of a small Genesis One group, and this group gives men the opportunity to develop relationships with other residents. These groups usually become strong support groups for the residents. There are also four chaplains available on the campus should a resident need to talk to someone or confide in someone. The office staff is also available during regular office hours should any resident need assistance with anything.

I came to Hand Up with the idea of staying one or two months until I could find my footing and move on, but I quickly learned the benefits of the 59th street campus. I have been here for nearly two years, and I have no immediate plans to leave.

If you have friends or relatives who are coming out of prison soon, or if they are already out of prison, and they need a place to land, consider Hand Up Ministries. It is a program with rules to follow, but whoever said rules are bad? Consider Hand Up Ministry as a place for men needing help or a good place sow a seed toward a positive ministry.



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— Ray Riddle,  
Assistant Executive  
Director

## TESTIMONIES

I was born in Cushing, Oklahoma. I grew up in and out of foster care. My mother wasn’t able to take care of my sister and me. This went on for several years. We were tossed around from foster home to foster home until a family member decided to take my sister and me into

her home. She introduced us to church, and this was when I found God and was baptized. My family members were church going people who loved the Lord.

I continued to go to church as I grew up. I moved out after I graduated from high school. I started drinking and trying to live a fast life. This life continued until Satan had me bound. I found myself slowly drifting away more and more each day, and I was living a life which wasn't pleasing to God. This led me to getting arrested and going to prison. I was in my prison cell in 2009, and God spoke to me. He told me to give my life to Him, and that is when my true relationship with God started.

I went to another prison, and I heard about Hand Up Ministries when David Nichols spoke at a Genesis One meeting. I can honestly say that being at Hand Up has truly been a blessing, and being here has made me the man I am today. I thank David Nichols for giving me a second chance.



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— Cornell Mukes

I was born in Las Vegas in December of 1992, and I am the youngest of four children. We moved to Oklahoma eight months after I was born. My parents didn't go to church. I went to a Baptist church with my grandmother, and this is how I was introduced to Christianity. As a child, I didn't take my faith too seriously, but a friend invited me to church when I was in high school. I really got into this church, and I was truly seeking the Lord. However, this church's legalism affected my relationship with God. I had bitterness toward my family, and this affected my relationship with members of the church. I began to withdraw and isolate myself, but I was still participating in church activities.

I wanted to surrender myself completely to the Lord, but I was still holding

onto hurts and pains. I wasn't studying the Bible daily, nor was I praying like I should. I was just going through the motions, and I began making bad decisions. I felt condemnation and shame all of the time. All of this emotional turmoil and my struggle with lust led to me committing my crime.

I turned myself into the police, which is what my pastor recommended. I spent five days in the county jail, and then I bonded out of jail. I fought my case for a year and a half. I took a blind plea, and I received a sentence of five years in prison and fifteen years of probation. I started attending a Bible study in prison, and my whole view on Christianity transformed. I began to see my identity in Christ and know I am forgiven. My relationship with God found depth.

My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries, and I came to Hand Up immediately after I left prison. I am grateful for a place to live, and I am grateful for the strong, lifelong friendships I have made here. I appreciate the church services and the fellowship with the men here. I have grown in God at Hand Up. The church services and the godly leadership have helped me in my relationship with God. I have had the same job for two years, and I was able to save money for a car. I participate in the worship team at Hand Up, and I have twice gone to Arkansas to perform praise music and testify at the church pastored by David Nichols' brother. There are many challenges ahead, but I know with accountability and faith I will be alright. I thank God for everything. He will see me through it all. Thank you.



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— Joseph Dodge

I was born in Woodward, Oklahoma. I was raised in a church which was very strict in its beliefs. Although I was raised in and around church, I had a strong drug problem. I

was dragged to church every Sunday by my grandmother. I rebelled against forced religion by using drugs, and later I started heavily drinking alcohol. As an adolescent, I got involved in sexual activity, and I slept with multiple women, although I found no satisfaction in any of it.

I started watching a lot of pornography. At age 19, I was arrested for public intoxication, and later I went to jail for 30 days for the sale of meth. In the next year or so, I faced multiple charges, including a 15 year suspended sentence for possession and distribution. I turned to alcohol to get away from drugs, and alcohol became my default coping mechanism. My dependence on alcohol led to experimenting with K-2, which caused me to lose control at times and have blackouts. My total loss of control, combined with having no direction in my life, caused me to do things which I didn't recall later. It was during one of those times that I committed a crime for which I spent eight years in prison. I am currently serving probation time for that crime, and I attend group classes to help me understand my triggers and restrain my behaviors.

Before going to prison, I was at a place where I didn't believe in God. I committed a crime that landed me in the county jail, and I knew I was going to prison. These circumstances began to sober my thinking, and, after about a week in the county jail, I fell to my knees and reached out to the God I knew as a child. A deep peace swept over me. My cellmate was a believer, and we read scripture and prayed together. It wasn't until about three years into my incarceration that a lot of things began to come together for me. I had been so wiped out for nearly a decade that I had no real remembrance of what I had done.

Scripture speaks of having a reprobate mind, and this verse comes closest to describing where I had been for a long time. I didn't care about anything or anyone. Life was a blur. After about three years of incarceration, God began to bring all of that back and help me remember what I needed to do. This was important for me to move forward. I went to a medium security facility, and I was told I was not a candidate for lower security because of my past. However, God had other plans, and they moved me to lower

security, where I met Christian brothers who inspired and encouraged me. I was able to grow in my faith.

Later, I was moved back to higher security. This was a blessing, because I teamed up with a man who helped me develop a genuine relationship with God (as opposed to just having knowledge of God). I finished my time at a lower security prison, and I was accepted at Hand Up Ministries. Hand Up wasn't the only place I could have gone, but I didn't want to return to a place where there were former friends, old drug connections, and the temptations of my former life.

Hand Up is a safe place to be. I now have a calling to preach upon my life, and I receive invitations from time to time to preach at various churches. My gift is to be an evangelist, and this is what drives my ministry. I am also called to be here at Hand Up so I can minister to the men here. I serve as one of four chaplains at Hand Up. I have a strong passion for the homeless, the lost, and those hung up on drugs. I lead a ministry which provides food, clothing, and ministry for the homeless. I believe in Hand Up and what Hand Up does. The future is bright for me, thanks to Jesus.



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— Michael Gonser

**We appreciate all our partners and donors. It is your support that enables us to assist individuals back into society as new brothers and sisters in Christ.**

