

Remembering “Miss Grace”

Mrs. Grace Morales (1925-2017)

is family.

Dismas, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501.c.3 organization. Donations are tax deductible.



Miss Grace, front row with her daughter Corinne, at her last community dinner with her boys, November 2016.

Mrs. Grace Morales, Dismas House’s longest-serving volunteer and the founder of its community dinner tradition, died March 2, 2017, in Nashville at the age of 91. Her large extended family includes 10 children of her own – who all served Dismas House with her, and the more than 1,000 Dismas House residents who she called “my boys.”

For almost 43 years, “Miss Grace” drove into the Dismas House driveway, parked near the basketball goal, and unloaded her dinner ingredients – most recently from a beige Toyota Camry whose bumper stickers proclaimed, “I like mountains,” and “Don’t Steal. The government does enough of that.”

In the Dismas kitchen, she lifted trays of meat loaf, her signature dish, into the oven, baked the hash brown potatoes, set her orange juice cake into the dining room, and chatted until dinner time with Dismas residents, staff members, and fellow volunteers. Many of “her boys” had left prisons and jails only a few days earlier.

I loved to see Miss Grace greet Dismas men, for the first time, who were two or even three times her size, when they walked into the kitchen after spending a summer day repairing roofs or digging trenches. She took hands or wrapped her arm around a man’s waist, saying, “I hope you like meatloaf. And I hope I made enough!” A fellow Dismas resident once told me, “She’s like my mother, my grandmother, and my favorite teacher – all wrapped up into one sweet, tiny lady!”

When Miss Grace was in the house, Father Jack’s story came alive. He had gone to her Catholic church in the 1970s, seeking support for the house he would open in 1974. When he asked Miss Grace to volunteer as a cook, she replied that she was too busy with her own 10 children, their church, school, and Cub Scout troop, and the family plumbing supply business. Father Hickey took that to mean a “yes,” saying, “You cook for 10 kids. You’ll work out just fine!”

Miss Grace never “retired” from Dismas House service. At her last community dinner, in November 2016, her daughter Corinne and son-in-law Moose drove Miss Grace in their car. Miss Grace still took her orange juice cake. She chatted and laughed with the men. She recalled her memories of Father Jack, whose portrait hung only a few feet away. And at the end of the evening, while putting on her coat, she promised to get back on the dinner schedule, in the spring.

- by Dean Graber

Client Testimony: Chris Gengler



Though he had no familiarity with Dismas House before his reentry process, Chris Gengler chose Dismas mostly for the convenience of the location. Little did he know it would be the lifechanging experience he needed upon being released from prison.

Chris's first impression upon entering Dismas House was one of a friendly, welcoming, and family environment, "I'll never forget sitting on the front porch that first day, and [the staff and I] just chatted, and instantly I felt part of something greater than myself," he says. Chris immediately tapped into what sets Dismas apart from other similar organizations – a family atmosphere demonstrating that reconciliation happens through community and through the undying love and support of a family.

The "come as you are" posture of Dismas House was especially meaningful to Chris. Getting to be himself around the staff, other residents, and the community that comes four nights a week to eat dinner with all our residents allowed him the space he needed to change his life. Part of that space included allowing Chris to go

out to eat with a friend on his first night at Dismas. "My first meal outside of jail was with my best friend in the whole wide world, and at other halfway houses, that wouldn't have happened," he says. The lack of pressure felt upon joining Dismas was a relief to what Chris felt when choosing and applying for transitional housing upon reentry. "The pressure is built up in your mind," Chris says, "what is going to be like? What are the people going to be like there? How long is it going to take me to find a job? Where are my essentials going to come from? And, everything was met.

"Dismas allows me enough freedom to succeed, [giving] me enough time to find a job I was looking for, not settling for something I necessarily had to get because I had to pay rent. The meals. The house itself. The space. The location. It allows me to be myself."

Chris says that if he could think of one word to describe Dismas, it would be "complete," meaning, "it's the complete package - being able to go to the doctor for free, the psychiatry help, the dentist visits, all of that, the match savings program - no one else offers stuff like this. Not even close. And, the only thing I had to give you was myself."

Being a part of Dismas has changed Chris's life, "it has allowed me to seek things that I have only thought about. I'm actively pursuing getting my LADAC (Licensed Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor). Before it was just a thought."

Through Chris's involvement with Dismas, he was able to get a job with Board Member Steve Ford at Results Handyman Service. "If it weren't for Steve Ford, I wouldn't be working there. And, if it wasn't for Dismas, Steve Ford wouldn't be around. I feel like I can work there for quite some time."

Chris is grateful for how far he has come in such a short time. The opportunities available at Dismas are part of what sets it apart from other transitional housing programs. Specifically, our partnership with Project Return has given Chris the confidence he needs to work through job applications and interviews.

Chris is proud to call Dismas his home, "When I think of family, I think of home. Your home is where your heart is and this is my home right now. It's more than a halfway house or transition house, Dismas is my home. I'm not afraid, I don't feel ashamed when I tell people that I live at Dismas. I feel like I'm making a statement. I've never felt that way before."

Volunteer Spotlight

Jenny Charles



"As an assistant district attorney, you are part social worker and part advocate. There are defendants who hurt others and need to be incapacitated, but a great deal of people's issues can be addressed through the right kind of treatment," says Jenny Charles, describing her role as Assistant District Attorney.

Jenny is convinced that if she were not working in the District Attorney's office, that she would be in nonprofit work, so it appears that she has found her niche as a member of the Dismas Board of Directors and as chair for the Program Committee.

Jenny became involved with Dismas House through the recommendation of a friend. Through her involvement on the board of directors, she has established Violence Interrupted, a program created to empower individuals on the verge of incarceration to live an alternative lifestyle free from violence and narcotics. Jenny began the program through a desire to see those who have been charged with gun crimes get connected with others in the Nashville area who can offer hope for another way of living.

When asked what is most satisfying about her job, Jenny says that it's when those who are accused of crimes are successful in turning their lives around. She considers her implementation of Violence Interrupted to be one of her greatest professional accomplishments.

New Staff

**Dismas Welcomes
Rebekah Childers as
Director of Development**



Rebekah Guerry Childers has joined the Dismas team as Director of Development. Rebekah brings with her over 4 years of nonprofit management and development experience, specifically in the areas of donor relations and grant writing.

Prior to coming on board, she worked with The Salvation Army of Nashville, enhancing donor and fundraising initiatives and bringing in new sources of revenue for the organization. She also worked for Abe's Garden, where she was exposed to the success of evidence-based techniques in serving a vulnerable population. Rebekah holds a Bachelor of Arts from Mississippi University for Women and will soon finish her Master of Arts from Trevecca Nazarene University. Her passion for social justice issues span that of the global community as well as the local community and has expanded over the years through her education and through various professional and personal relationships.

Originally from Columbus, Mississippi, Rebekah moved with her husband to Nashville over three years ago to make their mark in Music City. They have since expanded their family to include a five-year-old Labrador mix named Mabel and a one-year-old boy named Willie. They enjoy catching live shows and visiting the many parks around Nashville.

"I am excited about getting to raise support through telling the story of Dismas," she says, "Dismas is a model that works, and I'm very proud to get to align my skills with the mission of this great organization."

Program Spotlight

Interfaith Dental Clinic



Dismas residents at their first visit with Interfaith

Dismas is proud to announce a new partnership with Interfaith Dental to complement the clinical services offered to Dismas residents. Thanks to a funding partnership with the HCA Foundation, Interfaith will be providing oral hygiene examinations and treatments to Dismas residents at reduced rates. Founded in 1994, Interfaith provides affordable dental care for low-income, uninsured working families and seniors. Interfaith has grown to serve residents in ten Middle Tennessee counties through two clinic sites and nearly 200 volunteers. Emergency dental services for those needing relief from pain and complete dental services are also available. Because oral hygiene is essential for the overall health of the body, Interfaith's goal is to eliminate dental disease with individualized treatment and give patients the education and skills they need for proper oral health.

"We are thrilled to enter this partnership with Dismas," Interfaith CEO Dr. Rhonda Switzer-Nadasdi says, "Part of our overreaching goal at Interfaith is to help patients become more productive citizens within their community, which we feel aligns well with the Dismas mission."

Dr. Switzer-Nadasdi believes that a partnership with Dismas House will significantly help former offenders served by Dismas. "A smile changes everything," she says, "A healthy smile can hold a lot of power for someone. We often hear it gives patients new hope for life or the encouragement to start anew. The re-entry process can present lots of barriers – an unhealthy mouth or smile should not be one of those. Our hope in serving the Dismas population is that we can remove the barrier to receiving good oral health care."





The Big Payback, a community-wide, online giving day hosted by The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, returns on Wednesday May 3, and Dismas is thrilled to be participating!

The 2017 charitable event will help to support our programs, as well as, celebrate the good work of participating Middle Tennessee nonprofits, schools, and religious institutions

Kicking off at midnight on Wednesday, May 3rd, you can make your gift online to Dismas. Your contributions to Dismas could be amplified by additional incentives, bonuses and prizes made possible by The Big Payback sponsors throughout the day.

For more information, and to donate on May 3rd, please visit www.TheBigPayback.org.



Over 7 million people in the US are currently on probation, parole or in prison



Over 2 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States



Dismas has served over 1,000 people released from incarceration



Only 19% of Dismas graduates return to prison



The national average is 50%

Lifetime Achievement Award



GRACE MORALES

42 years of volunteer service

Guest Speaker



KARL DEAN

Gubernatorial Candidate and former Mayor of Nashville

Event Emcee



CARRIE SHARP

Emmy award winning journalist for News Channel 5



You are cordially invited to attend the 2017

FORGIVENESS Luncheon

May 24, 2017 / 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM

Renaissance Hotel / 611 Commerce Street / Nashville, TN 37203



To learn more, visit us online at:
www.DISMAS.org

2017 HONOREE





DISMAS
is family.

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Nashville, TN 37212

Future of Dismas

Capital Campaign Update



Every year, Dismas House receives roughly 350 applications for residency by incarcerated individuals. Because of our small facility and limited number of beds, Dismas is only able to transition 20 individuals from prison to permanent housing each year. Because of this disparity in available services and need, Dismas is launching a capital campaign to expand its facilities and services to reach up to 200 individuals each year. On October 6, 2016, Dismas House of Nashville finalized the purchase of a 0.5-acre land lot located at 2424 Charlotte Avenue for expansion of services to former offenders. Through funding from the Barnes Fund for Affordable Housing in the amount of \$260,291 and from the Housing Fund in the amount of \$2 million, Dismas will be able to begin construction later in the year with the hope of opening for operations by late fall of 2018. A groundbreaking is scheduled for the fall of 2017.

We need your support. To learn more or to donate, please contact Gerald Brown at gbrown@dismas.org.