



The Hope of the World

***Birds have nests, foxes have dens
But the hope of the whole world rests
On the shoulders of a homeless man
You had the shoulders of a homeless man
No, You did not have a home***

These words from Rich Mullins' song, "You Did Not Have A Home," set the circumstances of our "friends without an address" in an entirely different context. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of this holy child who would become a homeless man, let's take a minute to reflect on these circumstances.

The familiar story begins with a sobering reality (as classically rendered in the KJV): "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Later in Luke's Gospel, as Jesus' years of ministry unfold, He utters the words that inspired Mullin's lyrics and described His own circumstances:

"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

One of the main principles that guides our work here at C-U at Home is knowing that what we do for the least, the most vulnerable, we do for Him. On Christmas night, and through the coming year, there will always be room. And a place to lay his (or her) head.

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If you are new to our newsletter or C-U at Home, One Winter Night is our annual community awareness event that provides a powerful opportunity for our community to learn about homelessness, raise awareness for our friends without an address, and experience what it might be like to live outside, overnight, in the coldest part of winter.

With our **10th Annual One Winter Night** event less than two months away, planning and preparations are in full swing! Here are a few things for you to look forward to, be mindful of, and – most importantly – be in prayer with us about!

As you know, **The Venue CU** at 51 E. Main Street is our new **OWN 2021 Headquarters**. As we continue to wait for news about public event permits, we've mapped out a well-spaced layout for downtown box-dwellers along Main, Market, Neil, Chester, and Walnut streets. We are also looking to utilize private parking lots downtown if needed.

A few **churches** have indicated they would host box-dwellers on their grounds (please contact us if your church would like to do this). Remember, this year you also have the option to participate from your **very own yard**, and even "**virtually!**" Over **60** box-dwellers have already registered, and you can [add to that number](#) with a simple click!

Back at Event HQ, we are still planning for an evening of live music, powerful speakers, exciting guest appearances, and . . . filmmaker **Phil Goija** will premier his new documentary, [V for Vulnerable](#), which follows the work of **C-U at Home** and **Fortitude Community Outreach**

(Kankakee) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic!

In response to limitations on indoor gatherings, plans are underway to live stream the evening's events so everyone can enjoy the experience all night on their own devices wherever they are! And rest assured, our talented planning team is setting every possible precaution in place to keep **OWN 2021** safe and secure for everyone.

With the understandable possibility of a smaller number of box-dwelling participants this year, we are hoping to increase the number of **Business Sponsorships** for the event. If you are a local business owner who would be interested (or know of one), more information on our new [Business Sponsorship](#) levels and application forms are available online.

Nearly 100 Business Sponsors provided their support to **OWN 2020**. **One quarter** of them are already back on board for **OWN 2021**, plus a number of **brand-new** local businesses are joining us for the first time this year! Reach out to a business you know and appreciate, and help us grow that number even more!



Covid has made all we do around here more challenging than usual, but it has presented particular obstacles for our **Emergency Shelter** staff. Fortunately, we are blessed to have two devoted and dedicated **Shelter Coordinators** that help us provide “shelter from the storm” despite the current circumstances.



Steven Harper (above right) has worn a lot of hats since arriving here in 2018. He has led our Transitional Housing and Outreach Team and the C-U at Work program. This past October, Steven took on a new challenge as Men’s Shelter Coordinator.

While he still plays an important supporting role with our Street Outreach Team and Transitional Housing program, Steven has brought some much-needed stability and dedication to our Men’s Shelter staff.

“My motivation for working here is to try giving back the gift that was so freely given to me, a new life,” Steven relates. “Another big reason

I do this work is my faith. By helping the sick, the poor, and trying to walk as our Savior Jesus Christ did, I hope to become more like Him.”

Originally from the St. Louis Metro East area, Steven followed a difficult path through personal challenges to wind up here, at first, as a resident in our Transitional Housing. One of the reasons he’s able to work so well with the folks we serve is that he’s walked a mile (or ten) in their shoes!

A die-hard St. Louis baseball fan, Cardinal gear is everywhere in Steven's office, and it's what he almost always wears! He also enjoys golfing, working out, church fellowship, and spending time with his son.

“The reward of this job is watching Christ work in broken people's lives,” he notes. “To see people come to us broken and become flourishing and productive; that’s what keeps me going.”

Women’s Shelter Coordinator **Jennifer Burnett** started working at Austin’s Place last November and joined the C-U at Home staff in June 2020 when Austin’s Place became part of C-U at Home.

She’s overseeing the shelter in a very exciting time, as Austin’s Place will soon be moving to a new permanent home here at our main facility (see more in this issue’s “Focus on Ministry”).

“I have always been interested in the idea of a women’s shelter in Champaign-Urbana, but never thought we had one,” Jennifer says.

continued on the following page . . .

“When I was looking to change careers in 2019, I discovered that there was a women’s shelter, and there was actually an opening there!”

Working with the homeless population has always appealed to Jennifer. She finds it particularly rewarding to be able to help foster and create an environment which makes the women who stay in the shelter feel safe.

“One of the highlights of my time here has been helping some of our guests find housing,” she notes. “Mediating conflict between the guests is both challenging and rewarding, because it allows me to learn more about the people we help, and it grows my conflict resolution skills.”

Jennifer certainly holds the honor of farthest-away birthplace on our staff, having been born in Panama! Shortly afterward, her family returned to this area, where they have deep roots, and she’s been here ever since. She lives on a farm with husband (Andy), four daughters (Lyndie, Hannah, Bailey, and Hazel), one son (Artem), as well as two horses, a cow, three goats, three dogs, eight cats, 15 chickens, and a pig!

“I love to watch movies and shop with my kids, garden and hang out with my animals.” she says. With so much to take care of around home, no wonder she makes caring for a staff of seven and up to a dozen women who stay at Austin’s Place on any given night look so easy!

Focus on Ministry

During their first full year of ongoing operations, **C-U Men’s Shelter** and **Austin’s Place** housed more than 800 individuals in need. Renovations are currently underway at the main C-U at Home location at 70 E. Washington Street to provide a permanent home for Austin’s Place.



Jennifer Burnett checks out the work going on at the new home for Austin's Place

Eight dorm-style rooms in the northwest part of the building are being remodeled to create an office space (with a separate entrance facing Market Street) along with seven rooms that will accommodate two women each.

There will also be a lounge/kitchen between the rooms and existing shower/bathroom facilities. A new security door will separate the Austin’s Place wing from the C-U at Home offices, which serve as a buffer area between the Women’s Shelter and the Men’s Shelter (housed in the Phoenix Center at the west end of the building).

The completion goal for the new Austin’s Place wing is mid-January. Watch our [Facebook page](#) for updates on the remodeling progress and for news of an open house (of some sort!) in late January.



In our October newsletter, this space was given to excerpts from an episode of the popular podcast, **99% Invisible**. Titled “The Address Book,” the episode explored some of the challenges and issues associated with the simple lack of an address.

At the beginning of December, **99% Invisible** began a new limited series, **According to Need**. The five part series takes an in-depth look at homelessness in Oakland, California. In the “Prelude” episode, producer and host Katie Mingle shares an insight:

There’s this persistent myth about homelessness that the homeless people here aren’t really from here. Some people suggest that maybe folks came here from other areas to take advantage of better social services or better weather. But the data doesn’t support this. The last big survey done in Oakland found 78% of homeless respondents in the city of Oakland reported living in this county – Alameda County – at the time they became homeless . . .

Certainly, the circumstances in Oakland are quite different from our area. Katie visits large-scale encampments where homeless folks have created virtual villages. We don’t see that around here. She also interviews people who “live” in their cars and on the streets, which most definitely is a reality in C-U. But there is another simple and striking similarity. The stories of many of our friends began and even unfolded somewhere in Champaign County. It helps to remember that our friends are also our neighbors.

Recent episodes have turned to a critique of the “system” that provide services and support to the homeless community. We are mindful of how blessed we are here at C-U at Home to build on a strong foundation of genuine compassion and to work with an amazing network of supporting partners and local institutions that share our vision to “house and support the most vulnerable homeless on their journey of healing and restoration.”

It is an honor and a privilege to be a part of this unique outreach and support network; far too many people and organizations to name! You know who you are. Please know how much we appreciate working with you!

Business Partnerships

Mattex Service Company in Champaign, has partnered with us to generate thousands of dollars in support for **OWN 2021!**

For the past few months, **Mattex** has invited customers to participate in their “**Feel the Difference and Make a Difference**” campaign. They can take a \$25 discount on their service fees, or pay that \$25 forward to a local charity. Now through **February 5, 2021**, if customers so choose, **Mattex** will donate \$25 in that customer’s name to **C-U at Home!**

We are blessed to have this generous and compassionate business come alongside us. Keep them in mind for all your heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical needs!



HEATING • COOLING • PLUMBING • ELECTRICAL

A Word from... *Aleta*

“Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?” In the classic holiday favorite *“It’s A Wonderful Life”*, Clarence Oddbody tries to encourage a depressed George Bailey with these words.

In this hard year wrought with racial tension, a global pandemic, and extreme political divide causing even the closest of friends and loved ones to draw lines in the sand, I am one of many friends, family, and community members struck with sadness over a life that ended this year; a life that touched so many other lives, leaving an awful hole now that he's not around.

Todd Ledbetter, a friend loved by so many at C-U at Home and around the community, will not soon be forgotten by those who knew him. A man whose devotion to God and knowledge of scripture could rival any preacher, Todd would often be found relaying stories from the Old Testament, or quoting long passages of scripture including this one from **Isaiah 12:12** **“Behold God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid.”**

As this unprecedented year comes to a close, may we hold fast to those words in Isaiah that our dear friend clung to, and **choose to not live in fear, but to live in faith**; faith in **the One** who sent his son to be born so that we might **live forever with Him**.

Thank you, friends, for your continued support of our ministry, enabling us to support our friends without an address during the holiday season and throughout the year. It would not be possible without your continued prayers and support.

Wishing you and those you love a **joyful holiday season** and many blessings in the New Year!



PPE Project Blesses Staff

Duncan Cleary (above left, with our Phoenix volunteers **Charlie** and **Matt**), a junior at the University of Illinois majoring in Agricultural and Consumer Economics, recently blessed our Phoenix and Shelter staff with a supply of sustainable face shields to provide additional protection as they work during the pandemic.

Duncan is the team lead of the UIUC chapter of “Makers for COVID-19,” a nonprofit that extends across 30 states and 8 countries, created to help provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to places in need. The local chapter is set up in the Illinois Makerlab, which is the 3D printing lab in the Gies College of Business. Duncan leads a team of 5 students using cutting-edge technology to create the face shields.

“I decided to take part in this nonprofit because I’ve always had a mentality of giving to others,” Duncan explains. “My team and I try to use our talents to provide what we can so we can help people and places in need. We hope to provide more sustainable face shields and ear savers in the future!”

Thanks, Duncan; and GO ILLINI!