

# House of Hope provides safe harbor for shipwrecked lives

September 10, 2010

TRINITY—Pastor Jim Parrish’s church and its ministry to women both offer the same thing, and they put it right on the sign out front—hope.

People at Burning Hope Baptist Church know all too well their need for a better way, Parrish said.

“What we are is a New Testament church that has grasped what the Bible says—‘go into the hedges and byways.’ That’s what we do, and that’s why we are a hedges and byways people,” he said. “We’re basically a safe harbor for wrecked ships.”

Lisa Stewart (left), administrator of House of Hope in Trinity, and her assistant, Rebecca Dowers, understand first hand the importance of providing a place of refuge where women with substance abuse issues can find support in a Christ-centered context

Parrish retired from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice after 22 years and still works part-time for the prison system in Huntsville two days a week. His wife, Anita, has worked extensively in restorative justice ministries.

“One of the things I saw in working in the prison system is that when (inmates) get out, they need some place to go. They need someone to turn to and come around them as a support system,” Parrish said.

Burning Hope has tried to offer that support. The church operates a soup

kitchen twice a week. It began [Third Cross](#), a Christ-centered 12-step program that ministers to people with various addictions.

Burning Hope also launched the local Loaves and Fishes food pantry, but that now is a communitywide program supported by several churches.

“We didn’t want to be a traditional church. We wanted to be a ministry that included a church,” Parrish said of his congregation that numbers about 140 each Sunday morning.

“Then about four years ago, God said, ‘What about women?’” he said. That question marked the beginning of House of Hope, Burning Hope’s ministry to women whose lives have gone off track.

Parrish approached a Methodist layman in Trinity who owned a shell of a house. Parrish told the man if he would let the church use the house, members would finish the inside.

Now women flock to the home to get their lives together—spiritually and otherwise. They live together, study the Bible together, pray together and serve together. They also receive health care, clothing and food.

Lisa Stewart became the ministry’s administrator in January 2008, soon after she was released from a rehabilitation center herself, recovering from alcoholism. In the beginning, the ministry used the house for group meetings and classes, but women were referred to other long-term recovery centers.

Now the classes continue, but women also live there. They also attend Third Cross meetings, and faith-based counseling is available to them.

“All our classes are centered around Christ and the love and grace and mercy that he has for us,” Stewart said.

Rebecca Dowers, assistant house administrator, likewise came to House of

Hope after battling an addiction and several years living on the streets.

She came to the house in Trinity after four months of sobriety from her crack cocaine addiction, on referral from the [Good Shepherd Mission in Huntsville](#).

Both women agreed—the support women receive from their relationship with Christ and from the church sets House of Hope apart from secular programs.

“Addiction is a symptom of something else that is wrong,” Dowers said. “This program is about taking the word of God and showing people how to live and have a better way of life. It teaches them how to protect themselves from the things they were led into and that they were trapped in—to deliver them from that lifestyle and to show them a better way.”

That includes showing each woman that God has a purpose for her life, she continued.

“So, we want to focus not on just the emotional issues of each individual woman, but also the path God has for that woman and help her get on that path before she leaves this house,” Dowers said.

Both Stewart and Dowers said they had grown up in church, but they had not realized God’s care for them.

“A lot of times, people who are going through addictions and are living that way have some misunderstandings about God. They’ve had a lot of people tell them about God’s love but not show them God’s love,” Dowers said.

Every woman who has participated in the House of Hope ministry has made a profession of faith in Christ, she reported.

While the small house in the rural community does not have excess resources, “God always provides—sometimes the day before we need it,”

Dowers said.

She envisions a day where more people will be helped—both men and women.

“We don’t want to change the home environment, but we know more people have needs. And as God blesses the ministry, we will build more houses. And we’ll have many houses instead of one,” Dowers said.

“I believe that Jesus Christ is the answer for drug and alcohol addiction. ... I believe if we can work as God leads us to help the individuals we come into contact with that this will be a revival.

“This is not a simple program. This is practice. We’re practicing what God has given us. We’re reaching out and helping those that no one wants.”

The House of Hope ministry follows the example Christ gave, Dowers said.

“In Luke, he said: ‘I did not come for the healthy. I came for the sick. I did not come for the religious, but those who know they are a sinner,’” she said.

“There was not one person that I knew living on that street who didn’t know that they needed a change, but they had lost all hope in trying to find it.

“The message they had been given was not the message that I have received. The one I have received has changed my life, and he’s changed Lisa’s life. And one person at a time, it’s growing.”

The other women at the house have found that same message of hope.

Another Lisa now living in the house was homeless on the streets of Houston more than six years before coming to House of Hope a little more than two months ago. That time of sobriety is the longest she’s

had—without being incarcerated—in more than 38 years, she said.

“From the minute I got here, I’ve felt a sense of belonging. It’s called House of Hope, and this is my family now. This is my home,” she said.

How long she will stay at the house is not predetermined. The program lasts six to nine months, but a timetable is not the deciding factor.

“We don’t want them to leave because they’ve finished their six or nine months,” Dowers said.

“We don’t want them to leave this house until they’re in a good situation and we know that God has gone before them. We’re not rushing them out the door.

“When someone comes here, they’re here because God brought them here. This is his house. He decides when they leave.”