



Restoring Hope; One Life, One House, One Neighborhood at a time!

A Narrative View of Hope Restorations

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I doubt I'll ever forget the day, and I'm certain I'll never forget the expression I saw on Lawrence's face. Hope Restorations was just beginning. I had begun in 2014 buying, renovating, and then renting old, deteriorated houses in the poor section of town as a way of providing my own therapy, which would ultimately supplement my own retirement and estate. My son had taken his own life at 17 years old. We'll never know for sure exactly why, but we do know that it involved some combination of undiagnosed mental illness and verified substance abuse that somehow reached a point of hopelessness for him. After completing several renovation projects on my days off, I began realizing that I would soon become a full-time landlord rather than a pastor were I to continue at the current pace. Yet I couldn't stop. My soul was still far too disquieted for me to relent from the frantic pace it needed to dull the pain.

In mid-2015, I pulled together some good Christian friends who I knew each had deep concern for the addiction problems in our world and/or were deeply devoted to self-sacrificial work in the Kingdom of Heaven. This became an ecumenical board of directors of what started out as a plan to install insulation in the homes of poor homeowners struggling to pay high utility bills. We would raise funds to buy materials and to provide minimum wage employment to adults recovering from addictions. Generally speaking, an adult who has reached the point of knowing he needs help has also reached the point of having burned every bridge he has. He needs friends and family, but has destroyed all his relationships. He needs housing, food, and therefore, employment, but he has ruined his credibility and employability.

We would provide a way to return to work, relearn healthy work and life habits, and rebuild a new and better reputation and verifiable employment reference.

We turned to The Duke Endowment as a potential source of funding, but soon learned that they do not provide funds to sustain ministries. Rather, they provide funds to begin ministries that show ability to become self-sustaining. This led our board of directors back to the think tank where we came full circle back to my model of acquiring, renovating, and renting or selling homes in deteriorating neighborhoods. The rental income would become our self-sustaining revenue source over time.

The Duke Endowment liked our vision of helping people with one need, restarting their life after addiction, to meet needs caused by a severe shortage of energy-efficient, safe, and affordable housing. They agreed to fund two projects as a trial or test in 2016, with a consultant visit midway to check our progress and effectiveness. After receiving the good news and the \$65,000 check in September 2015, we were given a severely damaged and deteriorated house which became our first project. With money in the bank and a growing list of men wanting to work, we decided to begin in December by doing a few small insulation projects before starting the major renovation in January 2016.

At our checkpoint visit, we were told that they were impressed with our vision, our openness to its constant expansion or revision as we learn, and our careful and effective approach to problem solving and/or considering new opportunities. The consultant encouraged us to keep up at what we're doing and to go ahead and ask The Duke Endowment for more funding. Our subsequent grant request resulted in a very significant financial commitment for 2017-2019 with plans to review remaining funding needs at that time. We now plan to acquire and renovate approximately 45 homes by 2020.

Each morning, I got up and ready, loaded my tools and ladders, and drove my little Toyota pickup truck to the Flynn Home, a local halfway house for men. Men eager for another chance and for something to do besides sit around that old house all day loaded up inside and in the bed of my truck to go to work. As we travelled each day to a job site, I shared a little more about who we are, what we're trying to do, how we imagine it all unfolding, and who we are serving (The risen Christ!). Weeks went by with these early morning talks and vision casting, given sincerely from my broken soul to men who had completely lost their ability to dream and hope.

Lawrence was one of those men. Stone faced. Beaten up by life. Showed no emotion, likely because to do so might somehow make him be or seem vulnerable. He apparently had decided drugs must be cast out of his life for his own survival, but skepticism, bitterness, and caution were among his most reliable friends. We had both just turned the visors down in my truck as we turned the corner and now found ourselves facing into the morning sun when Lawrence said, "Wait a minute!"

"Let me see if I have this right," he said. "Are you telling me that this isn't your business?"

"That's right," I said. "This is a non-profit organization. A ministry of the Church. Our board of directors is all volunteer and we're operating on donated money."

"And you don't get no profit from the work we do?"

"No, just the joy of getting to know you guys and helping you get a better life."

"And you use your truck and your tools and your time every day to pick us up and help us work, but you don't own the business?"

"No one owns the business. We do this because we want to follow Jesus."

"Hmmm," was the last thing he said that morning.

I would love to tell you that Lawrence erupted in song and praise, hands waving in the air, in worship of the King that morning in my truck, like a Pentecostal revival had broken out, but that's not what happened. What did happen, though, may even be more beautiful in retrospect. Hope was reborn that morning in Lawrence. He began to dream again. He began looking for good again. His once stone-cold face became the frequent host of an infectious smile. Once a broken man looking for little more than a few dollars and something to overcome his boredom was now becoming someone caught up in something much bigger than himself. There was something in him, as he began to learn, that was worth nurturing, investing in, even worth sharing with others.

And my broken spirit began to heal too. Maybe I really do have a greater purpose to keep living and working in the wake of the death of my boy. Maybe God can and will redeem my grief with the joy of witnessing others being revived. Maybe God will turn my dirge of bitterness and skepticism into a song of hope and resurrection!

Not only has Lawrence begun attending a church that offers transportation, he has also become a leader and mentor to others following his steps. We recently hired a large and physically powerful man, I'll call him Tivarius, who called my cell phone in response to a piece he saw on the local TV news about us. He had been in prison 20 years. Vocational Rehabilitation would pay for him to learn to be a CDL truck driver, but only after he paid all his fines and fees. He needed short term, honest work so he could move on to this next hopeful chapter of his life. Otherwise, his only other opportunity seemed to be resorting to the same money-raising tactics that landed him in prison in the first place. We hired him, but a few weeks in, he called our project coordinator to say he needed to go home. This just wasn't working out. It was too overwhelming. He felt lost.

By this time our operations had grown large enough to hire a project coordinator, buy a used truck from the NCDOT auction, and an enclosed trailer for our growing inventory of tools and equipment. Our project coordinator, Tim Chase, agreed to go get him and return him to the pick-up site. But Lawrence had overheard Tavarius' side of the telephone conversation. By the time Tim arrived at the job site, Lawrence had laid down his tools, come alongside Tavarius, and convinced him to hang in there. Lawrence had told him that God obviously had him right where he wanted him and that he needed to stick with it. When Tim arrived, they continued talking about very deep and meaningful things until Tavarius finally said, "Mr. Tim, can I have a hug?"

A few weeks later, Tim and I decided to provide a meal for our work crew to celebrate Christmas together. We bought BBQ, fried chicken, and sides from a local restaurant, made a makeshift dining room table in the middle of the house we were currently renovating, and invited any of our board members available that day to join us. We held hands and prayed prayers of thanksgiving and hope. As we ate, I invited everyone willing to share something about what Hope Restorations means to them. Tavarius said, "I can tell you anything you need to know about how to survive in prison. It's all I know, but I can't tell you nothing about living out here in this world. It's scary. You people are helping me believe I can."

Another guest at our table that day told us all that, "I get up every day now and look forward to going to work. I have something important to do that's helping other people. And my children ain't ashamed of me no more." Yet another member of our growing community of faith said, "There's lots of folk who say they care and want to help you, but there ain't many who really do anything. You people are really doing stuff."

A couple months later, I was filling in for Tim one day by driving the crew home from the job site. Tavarius was sitting in the middle of the back seat of our big crew cab pickup truck so that I could see him in the rear-view mirror. He said, "Mr. Chris, today's officially my last day." I inquired about what was going on

and he reminded me, “You remember when you hired me that I said I only needed a job long enough to pay my fines and court fees, then I was going to learn to be a truck driver.... Well, today’s paycheck finishes off all I owe. I start at the truck driving school next week.”

I stopped the truck right there in the road, turned and shook his hand, and we all celebrated his victory together!

Hope Restorations is a non-profit corporation and ministry that emerged from the pastoral ministry of Chris Jenkins at Sharon United Methodist Church. Our purpose, as stated in our bylaws and our 501C3 application is:

“The purpose of the Corporation is to provide employment, training, recovery support and other assistance to adults recovering from addictions while improving or providing safe, comfortable, and more energy efficient housing to struggling families in our area. The corporation, which is organized under the Non-Profit Corporation Act of North Carolina, shall operate exclusively for charitable and educational purposes and in a manner consistent with Chapter 55A of the General Statutes of North Carolina and Section 501(c)(3) or successor provisions of the Internal Revenue Code.”

While our vision and ministry continues to expand and develop, we are already providing:

- Spiritual and emotional guidance to our work crew members and to our current tenants.
- Growth in faith and discipleship of board members and volunteers.
- Employment and vocational training to adults in recovery
- Reversing the downward trend of values in poor neighborhoods by acquiring and renovating severely deteriorating “eyesore” properties into clean, safe, affordable homes equipped with modern energy-efficiency technologies.
- Helping the community turn properties that were previously a taxpayer burden into usable, desirable, and property tax-producing properties.
- Identifying instances of unjust treatment of poor people in our community by utility providers, landlords, or others, and striving to serve as advocates for them to help them get just and fair treatment.
- Raising public awareness of the need, and of the presence of, this type ministry in Jesus’ name.
- Proclaiming the Gospel in all these endeavors every chance we get. Striving to make Jesus known by others through what we say and what we do.
- Restoring Hope in those who participate and in those who hear the story being told.

And we’re just getting started!

Find out how you can get involved by calling Hope Restorations at 252-560-7507, email us at hoperkinstonnc@gmail.com, and visit our website at <http://hoperestorationsnc.org>