



Hello Neighbor!

As the summer we've all enjoyed comes to a close, the temperature is dropping and the rain is starting. The season changes, but the needs of our community have not. That's why Emmanuel Bible Church is once again hosting the Union Gospel Mission in our space to facilitate a winter men's shelter. As our neighbor, we think it's important that you are given the opportunity to learn a little bit about this partnership, and have a chance to reach out to us. We have recently become aware that a few neighbors have concerns about the shelter, and we take those concerns seriously. Through this letter we hope to do a better job of explaining what the shelter is, how it works, how we are working to address concerns...and also how you can get involved if you are interested in helping out with this vital community service!

### **How the shelter works**

Emmanuel Bible Church is partnering with Seattle's Union Gospel Mission (UGM) for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year to offer a seasonal winter men's shelter. The organization of the shelter has greatly evolved over these four years, and we think we have now found an approach that is truly effective. In short, the shelter currently offers 20 beds, available only to completely sober men with local, state-issued identification. This is a strictly monitored "dry shelter," meaning that each resident is given a Breathalyzer test *every night*, and only those with 0.0% blood alcohol content are admitted. The shelter is staffed by multiple UGM employees at all hours when the men are present. These UGM staff members ensure that all residents are in compliance with community rules and standards, they monitor the group for safety and wellness by having someone awake at all hours of the night, and most importantly, they work diligently with each resident to care for their needs and connect them to resources for improving their lives. UGM staff lock all doors at 9:30pm each night at lights-out, and no one is allowed in or out until 6:30am. This helps to create a more secure and stable environment for the men and for the neighborhood.

Once someone has gone through the intake process (which includes a background check and interview) and has been assigned a spot in the shelter, it becomes their own dedicated bed and personal space for the remainder of the season. This is not a "drop in" site – it is now reserved only for registered guests. This new policy went into effect last year. An individual loses their spot if they break sobriety rules, don't show up for more than 2 consecutive nights, or if they obtain housing elsewhere. The men that stay in our shelter are from our own neighborhood; they are not bussed from the downtown UGM shelter. The shelter provides dinner as well as breakfast, and a bus pass in the morning with instructions to leave the area with no trace. We know that's not always been the case, and we do sincerely apologize. We also know that we've got a much better system for this that has been developing over the last year, and neighborhood impact has been significantly reduced. UGM staff members are committed to continue working with the men on those details related to loitering and trash left in the area.

Through the winter season, these men are offered all of Union Gospel Mission's services and programs, which are proven and effective. Last year, while staying at the shelter in our building, 23 men obtained work, 6 men obtained more permanent housing, 4 men enrolled in school to complete high school or get a GED, 15 men obtained significant medical treatment and used this space for recovery, and 9 men went into recovery or work rehab programs. Although every man has a different story, the average shelter resident is looking to improve their life and is using this space as a platform to make necessary changes. We know that systemic homelessness is a very real issue here in Seattle, and ignoring these people won't result in anything other than a continuation of the habits or systems that have them trapped. That's why we're proud of these numbers and our involvement in addressing this issue.

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### **How you can help**

The shelter is staffed and operated each night by Union Gospel Mission employees. These professional staff members are responsible for safety and security and for connecting the shelter residents with long-term support and recovery programs. With that said, we would love help from neighbors and church members, especially with preparing and serving nightly dinners, as well as simply being a present and caring host. Maybe you'd be willing to spend one night per week in our shelter developing friendships with 20 regular and committed guests who are working their way out of systemic homelessness? Hosting a dinner means showing up around 7:00pm with food, serving and cleaning up, and leaving after dinner around 8:30pm. Many people from Emmanuel and Mosaic churches fill these roles, but there is always room for more if you'd like to get involved. If you are not able to serve in the dinner schedule, another possibility is collecting needed supplies for our guests. Donations are welcome! Some current needs include: new socks and underwear, gently used winter coats, and new travel-sized hygiene supplies.

### **How to reach out to us**

If you are interested in getting involved, have questions, or would like to notify us of anything, please send an email to [shelter@emmanuelphinneyridge.org](mailto:shelter@emmanuelphinneyridge.org) or leave a message with the church office at 206.632.5539. Additionally, we encourage you to sign up for [nextdoor.com](http://nextdoor.com), which is a great way to stay connected and have discussions with neighbors in our area: the "Fremont - North / Woodland Park" neighborhood zone.

The Emmanuel Winter Men's Shelter will be open this year from November 2 – April 30.

For more information about Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, visit [www.ugm.org](http://www.ugm.org).

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and please do reach out if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

**Aaron McConkey**

Chairman, Emmanuel Bible Church  
[www.emmanuelphinneyridge.org](http://www.emmanuelphinneyridge.org)



## A Brief History of the Phinney Ridge Men's Shelter

The Phinney Ridge shelter opened in 2012 after Emmanuel was contacted by staff from the Union Gospel Mission. Church leaders decided that we had been wasting part of our building space on pew storage when there were dozens of homeless men within a few blocks of us, so we agreed to partner with UGM and provide a space free-of-charge so that they could open a new shelter to serve the North Seattle homeless.

### ***2012-2013: Beginnings***

The first year went smoothly, and was the simplest program of any year. We didn't promise the men anything other than a mattress pad and a bathroom, though they would get food from time to time. UGM was not bringing in any food for the shelter, so any food that the men did receive came from volunteers or donations. Market Time Foods on Fremont Ave began donating their leftover sandwiches and hot food at the end of each night, which was a huge help.

- \* Our capacity was limited at 33, though we averaged 12-15. There were about 10 guests who were consistent throughout the season. Our guess was that most people didn't know about it, since it was a new shelter.
- \* We observed that the consistent guests developed their own community. They trusted each other, they became friends, and they supported each other outside of the shelter. This new social stability allowed for real change in some people's lives.
- \* We didn't record much data this first year, and there wasn't any formal case management.
- \* Flyers were posted in the neighborhood prior to the shelter opening, explaining the basics of the program and soliciting feedback. Several positive feedback phone calls were received, and there were no negative comments from the community this year.

### ***2013-2014: Learning the Hard Way***

The second year got a little wild. Word got out about the shelter, and a staffing issue allowed some shelter problems to overflow into the neighborhood. UGM began to bring in some food for the guests, and we brought in a case manager for a few hours each week. We had mild success with case management, but meetings were too infrequent to be effective.

- \* Our capacity was still officially 33, though some nights it got upwards of 40, and once or twice even broke 50. (This situation was due to problems with a specific staff person.) It became clear that this model was not working for the residents or for the neighborhood.
- \* These new high numbers undermined the trust that we experienced in the first year. There were too many gentlemen to be friends with, items were stolen from time to time, and a few fights broke out due to people accidentally getting stepped on in the middle of the night.
- \* Police were called occasionally for fights or unruly guests, which created a disturbance for nearby neighbors in the middle of the night.
- \* There was a noticeable increase in the transient population in the neighborhood, and we heard comments about an increase in theft, prowling, trespassing, littering, and needles and bottles left in neighbors' yards.
- \* Because the shelter was at- or over-capacity, many guests became concerned that they would not have a place to stay if they didn't arrive early enough. Consequently, men began to gather and loiter around the shelter entrance several hours prior to the shelter opening. In some cases, guests would leave work early or decide not to work due to the risk of not having a bed for the night. This loitering was very visible to the community, and efforts to curtail it were only moderately effective.

### ***2014-2015: A New Model Comes Online***

The third year got back on track and a broad reform of the program was undertaken. We had a neighborhood meeting prior to the opening of the shelter, which is when we heard some of our neighbor's complaints and opposition. As a result of this input from the neighborhood, combined with our own observations, a radical shift was made to the way that the shelter was structured and operated.

- \* UGM began providing food supplies from their warehouse, so the men had dinner prepared for them each day that they stayed in the shelter.
- \* We reduced the capacity to no more than 20 pre-registered guests per night. It was no longer a drop-in shelter.
- \* We eliminated the first-come policy, and began reserving beds for guests who completed the whole intake and interview process.
- \* We removed our listing from 211 (an emergency services hotline) as well as from any public listing of shelters. This was done in order to more effectively limit our shelter to the Phinney Ridge homeless, rather than attract homeless people from other areas of the city.
- \* We more strictly applied our policy to only serve long-term residents of North Seattle, verified by interview and state ID.
- \* We more strictly applied our loitering rules, which was met with understanding and compliance from the shelter residents.
- \* We averaged 15-18 guests each night, and we felt the same sense of trust develop that we experienced during the first year.
- \* Professional case management was provided during open hours of the shelter. This allowed for regular follow-up by UGM staff and convenient access for the guests. A much higher number of residents were able to make significant life changes.

### ***Moving Forward***

The UGM Men's Shelter at Emmanuel is a continuously evolving project, and the last three years have allowed us to refine our approach significantly. The most impactful change occurred last year, when the shelter ceased to be a "drop in" operation, and shifted to a more committed housing option for men who are serious about improving their lives. There is now a zero-tolerance sobriety standard, with daily testing for all residents. A professional background check and intake process ensures that the only residents in the shelter are those who were already living in our neighborhood, and the increased level of community expectations and responsibilities have created a new level of trust and accountability. Real change is now taking place in people's lives, and the impact on the neighborhood is dramatically decreased. This year's shelter will utilize this same new "high commitment" program and stricter housing model. UGM staff supervisors who are present with the men at all times have received neighbor feedback about trash and loitering concerns, and are committed to better instructing and educating the shelter residents about expectations for living as good citizens of this Fremont / Woodland neighborhood. Church members will be increasingly involved in providing services and building relationships with the shelter residents, and we believe that as we build on the improvements that were made to the program last year, we can expect an even more positive experience in 2015-2016.



## Mitch's Story

*Mitch Arnold is a man who knows what it feels like to lose everything in the downward cycle of addiction and homelessness. Years later, Mitch is now a trained social services provider employed by Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, and will serve as the on-site manager at the Phinney Ridge shelter in the 2015-2016 season.*

*Photo: Mitch and his wife, Denise*

### **"The greatest of these is love"**

My personal experience with homelessness and addiction starts in 1974, the first time I used heroin. For the next three decades I battled that addiction, losing careers, family, friendships, and homes.

On September 25<sup>th</sup> some years ago, I found myself on the corner of 112<sup>th</sup> St. and Hosmer. It was 6:05am, and at that moment it seemed that my life had totally fallen apart; I had lost everything and had nowhere to turn.

I found myself at the Union Gospel Mission on Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, having no idea where I was and what the "Union Gospel Mission" was. By the grace of God, I entered the recovery program, committing to a yearlong program.

What I found at the Union Gospel Mission was a group of men that accepted me as I was and provided me with all the necessities that I needed at the outset.

During the year-long program, I experienced a great love that allowed me to take care of a lifetime of issues, including my addiction, family issues and marriage problems, legal issues, and the list goes on. Through the Union Gospel Mission "family group" sessions, my marriage began to be restored along with many of our family relationships.

Through the many men that were willing to walk with me during this year, things eventually began to shift for me and my family. Volunteers, UGM staff, pastors, and church members poured themselves into my life and my family's life, and it has been transformative. It's absolutely amazing to me the unconditional love that was shown to me and how life changing it continues to be!

Thank God that there were a few that still cared at a time in my life when I had lost everything, when my life had fallen totally apart. Today my wife Denise and I live in Kent, Washington, in our own home, and have a marriage and life beyond my wildest dreams.

In God's great love,

Mitchell R. Arnold