



THE NEWSLETTER OF CLARE GUEST HOUSE

Where motivated women find a supportive community

Vol. 2, No. 1, April 2007

Life Goes On

By Sister Gwen Hennessy

Life continues at Clare Guest House, and we are grateful for all of the gifts from near and far—the “village” support! We have received our twelfth guest and together with your help, we continue our small part in building the reign of God. The following messages have come from some of our guests.

From M.

My biggest trouble started about three years ago—when one day I decided that I just didn't care anymore. It had been about three years since I'd had a job, and I was offered a blank check. I took it, signed it, and cashed it. Things were good for a few months, until I was arrested. I went to prison for four months and then to Clare Guest House for seven months.

Two weeks after I got out of prison, I got a job. I am now 35 years old, and I've been working for over a year. I finished a treatment program within six months, and I received no violations while on parole. I paid all my fines and was granted an early release from parole.

I've since learned how precious life is to me and how fortunate I am to have had all the support I received from everyone at Clare Guest House. We still keep in touch, and I'm grateful for their friendship.

When I made a bad choice, my self-esteem was low. I thought I'd hit rock bottom...and maybe I did. If I'd have had the guidance and support I have today, my decisions may have been different, but I was blind. Don't be afraid to seek or ask for help. I've learned that I'm not alone.

From S.

I am 29 years old with two sons. I have used drugs and alcohol since I was 12 and have been in prison twice. Clare Guest House helped me greatly in the months that I was there. I was able to focus on myself and become grounded in my sobriety. I now see better what is important in life. I truly felt like I was meant to be at Clare Guest House. I continue with my vision and hope for a better life. I know that as long as I do the next right thing in front of me, things will work out for me. My children will be back with me, and we can continue on with our lives.

I believe every person has a purpose in life, and I'm thankful that Clare Guest House was there for me when I needed it. God bless all of you.

From L.

Since leaving Clare Guest House I've obtained a good job, moved into a nice apartment and I spend a lot of time with my family. I am so thankful that I got into Clare Guest House. With the help of the all the Sisters and the treatment program I was involved in I've been able to turn my life completely around.

From P.

Clare Guest House has given me the opportunity to save enough money to buy a car and get my own apartment soon. I have gotten my self-esteem back, and I am grateful to Clare Guest House.

From J.

Today I was enjoying my freedom, driving my car, getting a haircut, and shopping. I reflected back to exactly one year ago. I was being sentenced to prison for 15 years. I didn't think in one year I would be so lucky and free. I had to stop and thank God for it all. ☪



Clare Guest House provides a temporary safe home for motivated women just like these to assist re-entry into society. During their two- to six- month stay at

Clare Guest House, the women struggle to stay focused and to live out the dreams they hold dear.

A Message from Martha

By Martha Burchard, Board President

Clare Guest House began under the umbrella of the Sisters of St. Francis in October 2005. In November 2006, Clare Guest House became a separate nonprofit organization. We established our first Board of Directors with confirmation and election of officers in January 2007. Current board members include:

- Rev. Michael Erpelding, Pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Sioux City
- Alma Schmitt, Iowa Department of Human Services
- Rev. Pat Johnson, Deacon of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Fair Housing Coordinator, Sioux City Human Rights Commission
- Sister Grace Ann Witte, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Briar Cliff University
- Sister Shirley Waldschmitt, Sioux City Multicultural Neighborhood Project
- Martha Burchard, Retired Department Director, Mercy Medical Center

As a new Board, we will be recognizing and utilizing the gifts and talents of each member in order to sustain and promote the objectives of Clare Guest House in providing a place where motivated women can find a supportive community to assist their reentry into society after having been incarcerated.

Established by Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Clare Guest House is the fruit of many Siouxland community members' labor. Staff member Sister Gwen Hennessey fondly refers to "support of the village," for as we know, many hands come together to successfully generate and grow an idea.

We are grateful for the generous support of our donors who help financially, by volunteering, and providing in-kind help. And we ask for your continued s

Continued in next column

support of the Board as it carries on its work to establish By-Laws, Policies and Procedures, and finalization of our tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status. ☪

**"Welcome to Clare Guest House.
Please come on in."**



I am Cassandra McNeil, and I work part-time at Clare Guest House. When I'm not working here, I am a full-time student at Briar Cliff University in the theology department. My dream is to work with people in prison as well as after care. I have volunteered for the past 13 years in shelters, prisons and detention centers in the greater Siouxland area.

I have been through the prison system. Today, one choice at a time, I'm choosing to make a positive difference in society. It is a privilege to be at Clare Guest House. ☪

Helping Hands

Clare Guest House was the Recipient of the first annual Morningside College **Into the Streets** campus wide community service day! The invitation said, "No task is too big or too small".

On Tuesday, March 27, from 9:00 to 12:00 noon seven students arrived to clean a long overdue attic and to help with flowerbeds. Pictured here are Emily Cox, Marleta Smith, Megan Betsy, Maggie Konecuc, Heidi McHeer, Christine Harris, and Brenda Inssier.

We are grateful for their gracious gift of time and presence in building the reign of God in the community. ☪



Christians

By Maya Angelou

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not shouting, "I'm clean living."
I'm whispering, "I was lost
Now I am found and forgiven."

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I don't speak of this with pride.
I'm confessing that I stumble
And need Christ to be my guide.

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not trying to be strong.
I'm professing that I'm weak.
And need his strength to carry on

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not bragging of success.
I'm admitting I have failed
And need God to clean my mess.

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not claiming to be perfect.
My flaws are far too visible
But, God believes I am worth it.

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I still feel the sting of pain.
I have my share of heartaches
So I call upon His name.

When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not holier than thou.
I'm just a simple sinner
Who received God's grace somehow.

Thank You!

We send our gratitude to Mercy Medical Center-Sioux City for donating the layout and printing of this issue of the Clare Guest House Newsletter.

War is Not the Answer

By Sister Grace Ann Witte

"Getting tough on crime" is a misleading and counter-productive political slogan that we may hear often as political campaigns heat up in the coming months. This policy has created a crisis of prison overcrowding and human warehousing. Because the costs of construction and security have risen so dramatically, programs of education and treatment in prisons have been slashed.

Mandatory sentences and longer minimum sentences were created as part of the U.S. "war on crime." And once again, we are learning that a "war" on crime or drugs is not the answer.

The European Union has about the same number of women as are in the U.S., yet the U.S. has 10 times more women in prison. The U.S. has five times as many women as England has, but we have more than 20 times as many women prisoners.

The percentage of women in U.S. state and federal prisons has risen at a faster rate than the rate for men and is, today, the highest percentage since 1926 when this statistic was first recorded.

About 40 percent of the women in prison have been convicted of drug offenses. Of these, about one-third have been convicted of possessing drugs, not selling drugs.

Women receive disproportionately longer sentences than men because their involvement is typically more marginal (being in the same place where drugs are confiscated can constitute "possession"). Also, because they generally know less about drug operations than men, they cannot bargain information for a reduced plea or reduced sentence. Thus their sentences are disproportionately longer.

The result is that women who are found guilty and have a substance abuse problem are taken away from their families (between 60 and 70 percent of women inmates have children under 18), do their "time" and return to the community without having completed a substance abuse treatment program. Their likelihood of re-offending is great.

The fallout of long sentences and lack of treatment will be seen in future generations. Sixty-four percent of Iowa's female delinquent children had mothers who had been arrested or incarcerated.

During the coming months of political campaigning, help politicians see that their idea of being "tough on crime" needs to be less war-like and more enlightened.

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CLARE GUEST HOUSE
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712-255-1916

CLARE GUEST HOUSE...a place where motivated women can find a supportive community to assist their re-entry into society after having been incarcerated.

CLARE GUEST HOUSE BELIEVES THAT EVERY WOMAN...

- ...is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore has dignity and deserves respect.
- ...has the ability to grow and deserves support in her development.
- ...needs healthy relationships and deserves to live in a safe and secure community, regardless of race, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability.

CLARE GUEST HOUSE BELIEVES THAT EVERY WOMAN RETURNING FROM PRISON DESERVES...

- ...support in the transition toward fully responsible citizenship.
- ...a mentor who will facilitate this transition.
- ...the opportunity to experience respectful community living.
- ...assistance in finding employment and housing.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME...

Volunteers are needed as mentors, to provide respite care for regular staff, and to do simple household repairs. We also welcome donations of paper products, salad dressing, and parmesan cheese. Please contact Sr. Gwen at 712-255-1916, or you may e-mail her at glhennessey@hotmail.com.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION...

Financial contributions are always welcomed and put to good use. If you would like your donation to be tax-deductible at this time, please make your check payable to Sioux City Multicultural Neighborhood Project, 1918 Douglas Street, Sioux City IA 51104.