

Church Converts Hospital Into Center to Help 'Hidden Homeless'

✖ Pastor John Wiley didn't think it was fair that the working poor or "hidden homeless" in Kansas City, Mo., had to live in pay-by-the-week motels, so his church did something about it.

River Christian Fellowship in 2009 purchased a \$16 million vacant hospital for \$1 million and is working to convert it to the River of Refuge Dream Center, a 150,000-square-foot facility with 350 beds.

Wiley said three years ago he watched as nearly a dozen children got off a school bus and went into a motel. At the time he thought to himself, *No child should have to live in such a horrible place.*

So the church began reaching out to homeless people who pay \$800 to \$1,200 a month to live in motels. "We've been rescuing these families, paying their rent and taking them hot meals, but the financial weight got to be a lot," Wiley said.

While driving past the old Park Lane Hospital one day, he said to himself, *Somebody ought to buy that hospital and turn it into a place for homeless people*—and he quickly became accountable for his words. "God told me, 'You do it,'" Wiley said.

Wiley says his 300-member church supports the Dream Center along with individual donors who give \$5 and \$10 or larger amounts.

He said when the center opens, the first priority is to reach out to homeless people in metro Kansas City. "You have to start with what you have in front of you, and what we have are homeless people in front of us."

Wiley says the Dream Center also will work with local and state governments to provide housing for victims trapped in human trafficking. He said Kansas City has the highest arrest record for human trafficking in the U.S., and victims need a place to live while officials figure out the next course of actions and the young women go through court proceedings.

One floor of the center will house interns involved with Ignite, a program for students interested in performing humanitarian work while earning 28 college credits for their efforts.

To learn more about the Dream Center, visit the River of Refuge Web site.