

# Transitional House in Indianapolis Helps Give Ex-Offenders a New Start

Jesus House director William Bumphus says Christians don't have to wait for grant funding to reach out to former prisoners

With tan siding, a porch dotted with oversized furniture and a fireplace in the living room, the modest, two-story home in inner-city Indianapolis doesn't look like the cutting edge of prison reform.

But after six years in operation Jesus House boasts a recidivism rate of 6 percent, or less than one-tenth the national average. Only eight of 130 men who have lived at the halfway house have returned to prison—a feat the federal government is still trying to duplicate. Two years ago the Department of Justice announced a “re-entry initiative” to offer education, job training and substance-abuse treatment to help ex-convicts adjust to life on the outside.

Jesus House director William Bumphus is doing his part—but without any of the grants available under the Justice Department initiative. The 57-year-old founder of Jesus Inside Prison Ministry says he can't qualify because of his insistence that residents attend two church services and a weekly men's support group.

However, Bumphus plans a similar approach at Freedom House, a 60-bed residential drug-treatment center that he hopes to open in 2005. With 55 percent of federal inmates locked up for drug

crimes, the affable, smiling minister says it makes more sense to send them to drug treatment. When they get there, though, Bumphus wants them to find the same Savior who released him from the grip of heroin in 1978.

“I’m suggesting Christians open drug-treatment centers like Teen Challenge and deal not only with the physical and emotional part of men, but the spiritual element,” Bumphus said. “Then a whole lot of crime would go away.”

As for the expense, he thinks Christian ministries should depend on God instead of Uncle Sam. Even if they obtain funding, they still won’t be able to run such treatment centers the way they want, said the pastor of Faith Center Church, an independent charismatic congregation. “There’s enough money in the church for everyone to have a Jesus House if they wanted one,” he said.

The home’s population fluctuates between a few and 10, although its director envisions remodeling it to double its capacity to 20. Many current and former residents credit its wholesome influence with steering them straight, including its first resident director, Robert Weddington.

Scholarly-looking behind wire-rim glasses, Weddington stepped aside last fall to run a Christian bookstore and Faith Center’s men’s ministry. He still serves as an informal adviser and counselor.

“When I left prison, it wasn’t in my program to lead Jesus House,” Weddington said. “God just put it together.”

His replacement, Jerry Banks, arrived early in 2003 after four

prison stays. Accepting Christ in 2001 was his first step toward reformation; coming to Jesus House marked the second. "It had a strong impact on my life," Banks said. "I was able to maintain my Christianity and continue to be around godly men who want to grow [spiritually]."

The outreach continues despite financial challenges. Thanks to various churches donating food, clothing and other supplies, Bumphus operates the home for less than half the projected cost.

Jesus House is only one aspect of what Bumphus sees as a thriving revival in the nation's prisons. Since 1997 the number of annual conversions he records has more than doubled to more than 2,000.

For those who would shrug at the relatively small numbers he has helped—in comparison with an inmate population in excess of 2 million—Bumphus notes that he saves taxpayers \$100,000 a year for every five residents who aren't locked up.

"[Many] guys who came through were major drug dealers; they hurt people," Bumphus said. "[Jesus House] gives hope to thousands from all over the [nation]. We get applications from all kinds of people who want to come to Jesus House."

**Ken Walker in Indianapolis**