

Iowa Dream Center Demonstrates Christ's Compassion

"Dream Center." What do those two words bring to mind?

For people involved in the church world, those words might inspire visions of "big"—big buildings, cities, churches and budgets—that make a big difference. And for the most part, those thoughts would be accurate.

Dream Centers are typically significant structures that have been converted by large churches to serve as centers that help the homeless and the financially struggling with everything from clothing and food to counseling and medical assistance. They can be found in cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Atlanta and Dallas, where the metropolitan areas run into the millions of people. Dream Centers can even be found in much smaller communities, such as Peoria, Ill., where the metropolitan area nears 380,000 residents.

But what about a small town, where a "megachurch" runs in the hundreds instead of the thousands? Is a Dream Center even possible in a town whose metro-area population isn't in the millions, hundreds of thousands or even tens of thousands? What if the metro population was just 13,000, give or take a few hundred?

Just over four years ago, candidate pastor Kevin Grimes and his wife, Kim, were being driven across town to visit Dayspring Assembly of God in Spencer, Iowa. The fact that the Grimes were here at all was a miracle in itself, as they had spent the last 20 years living and ministering in Los Angeles. Needless to say, LA and Spencer had some differences.

However, both Kevin and Kim were convinced God had something

new for them. Although Spencer, Iowa, wasn't on their radar (or the Midwest, for that matter) when God first spoke to them months before, what was in store for them was about to be foreshadowed.

As they drove down Grand Street, the main drive in Spencer, they passed the town's landmark building. A six-story hotel, the structure stood head and shoulders above the other community buildings. It was for sale. Suddenly Kevin spoke up. "That would be a great place for a Dream Center," he commented, not realizing at the time the thought was God-inspired.

Soon after, the Grimeses were elected and inherited a healthy church that averaged about 140 people on Sunday mornings. In his first Sunday service, Kevin says he felt impressed by God to share his burden for the church to not only make a difference around the world through missions but also in their community. By now, he also knew his initial impression about the hotel as a Dream Center was not just his own musing, so he dropped the bombshell.

"I told them that I felt the Lord wanted us to start a Dream Center in that old hotel," Grimes says. "The next instant, the church erupted—in applause."

Grimes had struck a passion that had been growing in the church body to impact its community. But when the church contacted the realtor for the hotel, the \$559,000 price tag threw a cold dose of reality upon their excitement. It wasn't a lot of money by LA standards, but it was a discouraging price tag by Dayspring Church in Spencer, Iowa, standards.

"We didn't have that kind of money," Grimes explains simply. "But you almost can't go anywhere in town without going down Grand Street. Ten times a week, I would drive by that hotel and just know God wanted us to have it."

Finally, Grimes couldn't stand it. He called a realtor and

asked for a tour of the building—a building he knew they could never afford.

As Grimes toured the hotel, he was told that three years ago, when the bank foreclosed on the building, the staff was given only 20 minutes to vacate the property. “Honestly, the hotel was like a scene following the rapture,” Grimes says. “Beds were half-made, a vacuum was left in the middle of a room—there were even French fries left in the fryer in the kitchen.”

But as the realtor took Grimes floor by floor through the old hotel, Grimes began seeing visions.

“As we walked through the building, there were no utilities. It was damp and moldy,” Grimes recalls. “But as I looked, the Lord just gave me visions ... When we came to the bar area, I saw a vision of a cup of [premium] coffee sitting on the bar—and I don’t even drink coffee! When we came to the basement, it was all dingy, and mushrooms were growing in the carpet, and I saw a youth center. The second floor, I saw food and clothing distribution, a prayer room.”

As they continued through the building, the visions continued as Grimes saw a free medical center, an after-school program, a residential program for victims of human trafficking, an exercise facility—even an indoor skate park!

Grimes shared the visions with his church board, but even though they were excited about the possibilities the building had for impacting the community in so many ways, without the finances, Grimes’ visions were only dreams.

Finally, torn between the improbability of God’s vision and the reality of no finances, Grimes requested a meeting with the owner of the hotel, a local businessman.

“When I arrived for the meeting, he treated me like his best friend. He was just super gracious to me,” Grimes says. “I

told him my idea for the hotel, the visions I had for it. In my heart, I was just hoping he could help us find a way to purchase the building.”

The businessman considered Grimes’ proposal for the hotel for a few minutes, then began to speak. He explained that several other individuals had come to him prior to Grimes with proposals for the building, but, he said, he liked Grimes’ ideas best.

So, he decided to give the building to the church.

The improbable had just run head-on into a God-given vision. It was no contest.

Grimes, who somehow kept (most of) his composure and held back a “happy dance,” shared the meeting’s outcome with the church body—and their responses weren’t quite as controlled.

Since that miraculous meeting in 2009, the hotel has been transformed far beyond the eyesore it was becoming. Although several of the visions given to Grimes are still in progress, many of them are already fulfilled.

In January 2011, after much renovation, the hotel reopened as the Spencer Dream Center. The bar area is now the 2,700-square-foot Terrazzo Coffee House that serves premium coffee along with a selection of soups, salads and sandwiches.

“It is the nicest, coolest place in Spencer,” Grimes says. “Also, the coffee house helps offset the cost of the building’s utilities and insurance.”

In addition, the youth center is complete, where four days a week, 40 to 50 kids come to hang out and play pool, ping pong and other games—and those who are there on Wednesdays find themselves in the church’s youth group beginning at 6 p.m. The center includes 11 Living Free small groups—roughly described as “outpatient Teen Challenge”—that offer proven, godly

solutions to eating disorders, drug addiction, loss and grief, depression and other issues.

But that's not all. A medical center and a dental center, manned by doctors and staff volunteering their time, are also up and running. The center also gives out about 3,000 pounds of food and 2,000 articles of clothing each month, and a local businessman has offered up to 90 beds to be given to families in need. Also, nearly all the furniture and bedding in the hotel were given away to those experiencing financial hardship.

"We have over 100 volunteers in the building every week doing all kinds of outreaches," Grimes says. "We're about halfway through renovating the building. We're applying for grants and existing through private donations, but we already have the equipment for the fitness area promised to us from a major distributor once we can complete the renovation of the fifth floor."

Perhaps one of the most joy-filled features of the new Dream Center is the "Say Yes to a Dress" area. In this section of the building, formal, wedding and prom-type dresses are collected, complete with shoes, purses and necklaces.

"For a young girl or a bride-to-be without the money for a prom or wedding dress, this room is a place where volunteers can help girls find a beautiful dress and just gush on them," Grimes says. "It's not really about the dress; it's about showing these girls the love of Jesus. We have seen great fruit from this outreach."

One of the biggest challenges that still confronts the Dream Center is getting the building up to code.

"The hotel is about 100 years old," Grimes says. "Before we can begin residential/overnight care for victims of human trafficking, we need to have a sprinkler system installed—which is a huge expense. But we already have plans

for helping these women through Living Free recovery groups, our medical clinics, free GED programs and vocational training.”

Grimes says that the Dream Center vision didn’t come without some bumps in the road. Some church members decided to move on, as the emphasis on outreach was too great. Even the city expressed initial concern that the center would be abused and draw an undesirable element into the community.

However, Grimes says that community leaders are now more than impressed with what’s taking place in the Dream Center, and Dayspring Church is now averaging 220 on Sunday mornings—with nearly all the growth being through new converts.

Grimes says that his desire is to one day see all the churches in Spencer coming together to make the Dream Center a ministry to the community.

“We already have volunteers from other churches working at the Dream Center,” Grimes says, “but I would like to see many more churches and volunteers join in meeting the needs of hurting people in our community.”

Although the Dream Center has become a major focus for Grimes and his church, it isn’t the only focus. In addition to regular Wednesday evening discipleship programs and Sunday services, each year for Easter and Christmas the church goes all-out in producing spectacular plays.

“Our church seats 400, and we regularly pack the church out three or four times for each production,” Grimes says. “People come from Nebraska, Minnesota and South Dakota to attend these productions, and we’ve literally seen thousands of souls saved over the past four years.”

Grimes, who says it has been a new and enriching experience for both him and the church in blending his big-city ideas with their small-town ideals, believes evangelism and

discipleship should be at the heart of everything a church does.

“I believe every community should have a Dream Center,” he says. “You don’t have to be in a big city to have one. You can do it even in a small town like this and make a big difference.”

For more information on Dayspring Church, see its [Facebook page](#).