

Florida Ministry Guides Homeless
By Example And Expectations

BY KATE SANTICH
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ORLANDO, Fla. — Take equal parts Dr. Phil and Mother Teresa, stir in a youth tainted by dysfunction, drugs and living on the streets, and you have the man behind one of the fastest-growing, most successful homeless programs in Central Florida.

Pastor Scott Billue — a high-speed, tough-love 50-year-old with a boy-band haircut — is founder of the 2 1/2-year-old Matthew's Hope program in Winter Garden, Fla., run with the support of 50 churches, hundreds of volunteers and scores of local businesses.

Sprawled behind the Church of Christ of West Orange, the operation began as a freeze shelter where those who lived in the woods could seek refuge from the nighttime cold. Now it's a full-time operation with 1,500 clients. At Matthew's Hope, the homeless can get groceries, clothing, medical and mental-health care and eye exams. They also can tend an organic garden and get help finding jobs.

Most unusual, though, is the ministry's detailed accountability system that allows those who do work there to earn "pastor bucks" that are exchanged for supplies. A sleeping bag, for instance, is 20 pastor bucks. A new bicycle with a lock and a bike light? Two hundred. Lunch with the pastor himself at a nice restaurant? Forty — and, buyers say, a bargain.

After all, Billue himself earns no salary. "I spent nights crying and crying and wondering why people turned their back on me," recalled Michael Russ, a 51-year-old Army veteran who worked for the city of Apopka, Fla., before losing his job, his wife and his home. "Then I found this place. I love coming here. I love working here. Pastor Scott really cares about you. They all care about you. And working gives you the feeling that you have a job again, you know? It makes you feel like somebody."

Tina White, now 52 and living in Alabama with her husband, Drew, agrees. The couple came to Matthew's Hope soon after it opened, when they were staying in a half-finished home without functional plumbing or electricity. At the time, Drew, who had worked in construction, couldn't find odd jobs to keep them afloat.

"They paid for my husband to get his identification card, got him work boots and even gave him a bicycle so he could get back and forth to a job — because that was the only way he had," Tina said. "They don't just toss a few crumbs at you and say, 'See you next week.' They help you get off your behind and get your life back."

Today, Drew is working full time in a grocery-store meat department, and Tina is studying to be a paralegal.

Joe Gick, a pilot for Southwest Airlines, will tell you it's more than the accountability system that makes Matthew's Hope work, although he's a big fan of accountability. When he learned about the ministry through his sons' Christian school, Foundation Academy, he decided to see what it was about for himself.



Pastor Scott Billue shows some of the many supplies they have on hand for clients at Matthew's Hope. Three years ago, Pastor Billue opened a freeze shelter for the homeless in Winter Garden, Fla., near his church. He had no idea the project would quickly take over his life — growing into a nonprofit agency supported by more than 50 churches, civic organizations and local businesses.

"Once I met Pastor Scott, my life was changed," said Gick, who spent a week's vacation volunteering there recently. "Everything he does is on the premises of the Gospel of Matthew, and even though I had read the Bible before, it made me really study those verses. It's not that Jesus said you should help the less fortunate, he said you must help."

"At the end of the week, I said to Scott, 'Damn you for shining a light on all this.' And he started laughing. Because once you know, you can't turn away. You see a man who has been homeless himself, who has been a drug addict, and now he has rolled up his sleeves and is living the Bible in the trenches."

Billue's own background is one reason the tough-love approach works. He knows what he's asking of people to quit drugs and work their way out of homelessness because he has done it.

Growing up in Indiana the product of parents with nine divorces between them, he was molested more than once, including by one of his stepfathers. As a kid, he often lived on the streets to escape home life, and he started doing drugs at age 9. By the time the family had moved to Florida in 1975, Billue found himself bouncing from motel to motel with his dysfunctional mom.

But by his 20s, he'd discovered his ticket to success in sales, and with a six-figure income, his tastes upgraded to cocaine. He sold software, then sporting goods, then toilets. Fast-talking, likable and ambitious, he could sell pretty much anything.

"I thought of myself as a higher form of addict because I was functional," he said. "I could

do an eight ball (3.5 grams) by myself and go for a couple of days nonstop, running seminars and making huge money. I knew people who died from doing a whole lot less."

Meeting his future wife at a softball game — where she first struck him out, then hit a line drive to his groin — saved him. She was the divorced mom of an infant daughter, and he knew enough about his own parenting role models to realize he didn't want to duplicate their example. He quit drugs cold turkey.

But it was a chance venture to a church sermon that left him feeling unexpectedly disoriented — and then invigorated. Soon it was all he could think about.

"God turned my life inside out," he said. "I was having conversations with him at night in my sleep. It got to the point where I couldn't help but listen."

A high-school dropout, he worked his way through seminary school before being hired — and fired — by three churches for his habit of challenging congregants to walk the walk. Six years ago, he started the nondenominational Next Community Church, which has about 100 members.

He earns no salary there, either. "He has a brilliant business mind," said Cathy Jackson, executive director of the Homeless Services Network of Central Florida, the agency that secures grant funding for charities and helps coordinate their efforts. "If I won the lottery tomorrow, one of the first donations I'd make is to Matthew's Hope because I know their work is outstanding. His view is that they need to consider the whole person for the long term."

New DivorceCare Programs To Begin Jan. 7

DivorceCare, a special help seminar and support group for people experiencing divorce and separation, meets on Mondays at 7 p.m. in Adult Classroom No. 3 at Calvary Baptist Church, 2407 Broadway, Yankton. A new session begins on Monday, Jan. 7.

DivorceCare features nationally recognized experts on divorce and recovery topics. Seminar sessions include "Facing My Anger," "Facing My Loneliness," "New Relationships," "KidCare" and "Forgiveness."

If you are separated or divorced and have children ages 5-12, the church also provides a companion program, DivorceCare4Kids, on Monday evenings beginning Jan. 7 at 7 p.m. in the Preschool area at the church.

For more information about DivorceCare, call Keith and Denise DeJong at 605-664-5252. If you have questions about DivorceCare4Kids, call the Calvary at 605-665-5594.

Antioch Baptist Church To Hold Revival

Antioch Baptist Church, 100 East Douglas Avenue in Yankton, will have a revival Jan. 10-12 at 7 p.m. featuring special preaching by Pastor Dan Thorton.

Everybody is welcome to join the revival and receive a blessing.

Sacred Heart School To Host BINGO Night

Sacred Heart School will host a BINGO Night on Friday, Jan. 11, at the Sacred Heart Gathering Center, Fifth and Capital, Yankton.

Play begins at 6:30 p.m. Godfathers Pizza will be on sale beginning at 5:30 p.m. Beverages and snacks will also be offered for sale. Admission is a suggested donation, and everyone is welcome. For more information, call 605-665-1808.

Divorced, Separated, Widowed Group To Meet

"Divorced, Separated and Widowed," a support group sponsored by Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, will meet at Roncalli Center, Mount Marty College, Yankton, each Monday night at 7 p.m. beginning Jan. 14, 2013.

The support group is a nine-week program created to help divorced, separated and widowed persons work through and deal with the different stages of grief in their lives. The book, "Rebuilding When Your Relationship Ends" will be used as a text to provide a guide in understanding and adjusting to the ending of a love relationship and to rebuilding self-esteem and positive relationships with those around them.

For more information, call Carol Hamvas 665-7158.

Film To Be Shown At Summit Center Jan. 16

"October Baby," a moving and life-affirming film, will be shown at the Summit Activities Center Theater in Yankton at 7 p.m. Wednesday Jan. 16. This film is rated PG-13. Admission is free.

Beginning at 6:30 pm, there will be live music from Charis. Visit www.octoberbabymovie.net to view a trailer of the movie. Contact Dave at Sacred Heart Parish for more information: 665-3655.

MVCA To Host Kindergarten Preview Event

Missouri Valley Christian Academy, a nondenominational Christian school located in Yankton, will be hosting "Spotlight on Kindergarten for Fall 2013" at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 21.

Interested parents with a child entering school this fall will receive information about MVCA and the kindergarten program while their child participates in special, planned activities. A free meal will be provided so RSVP by calling 665-4470.

For more information, visit the school's website at www.mvca-mustangs.org. MVCA is located at 305 W. 25th St.

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CHURCH SCHEDULES

Table with 8 columns: Abundant Life, Baptist, Catholic, Church of Jesus Christ, Lutheran, Non-Denominational, United Methodist, and others. Each column lists church names, addresses, and service times.

Read & Recycle!

L&S ELECTRIC Harry Lane Electrical Contractor. 1600 E. 39th St., Yankton. Commercial/Residential/Farm Wiring.

Stevens Construction, Inc. (402) 388-2477. Crofton, NE.

WINTZ & RAY FUNERAL HOME and Cremation Service, Inc. Garden of Memories Cemetery. 2901 Douglas • Yankton • 605-665-3644

Read & Recycle!

SACRED HEART, 509 Capital, Yankton, Rev. Mark Lichter pastor. 665-3655 (office). SAT. 4:30pm Mass. SUN. 8am, 9:30am, 11am Mass. THUR. 12:30pm, 2:30pm and 7:30pm Confessions.

ST. ANDREW'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, Bloomfield, NE. Fr. Michael Schmitz SUN. Mass: 10:30am; TUE. Mass: 8am; THUR. Mass: 7pm. Confessions: THUR. 6:30-6:55pm.

LEADER CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION INC. Basements • Bunkers • Manure Pits Residential & Commercial Call Larry Leader Yankton • 665-2717

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THE HOUSE OF MARY SHRINE, 6-mi. W. Yankton, Hwy.52. Masses: Monday 8:30 through October. Masses Saturday 9:00 every Saturday. Rosary Sunday 4:00. Rosary 4:00. Open 7 days a week for prayer. thehouseofmaryshrine.org

Christian KINGSWAY CHRISTIAN Church, 19th&Burleigh, 665-6317. Joseph Mason, Pastor. 9am-SS; Worship 10:15am. Wed. 7pm Kids for Christ/Adult Bible Study. www.kingswaychristianyankton.org

Larry's Plumbing Service 703 Burleigh St. 665-4322

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CHURCH OF CHRIST, 1114 West 12th, Yankton, 665-6379. SUN. 9:30am Bible study; classes for all ages. 10:30am Worship.

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HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH, AFLC 200 South Wilson, Delmont. (605)935-6941. SUN 9am Worship. 10am Sunday school. firsthope@santel.net

Martinus Lutheran Church, Utica. Pastor Dean Schroeder Sunday Divine Service 10:30am (605)589-3195 www.MartinusLutheran.org

TOPKOTE, INC. Asphalt Maintenance 43439 SD Hwy 50 • Yankton (605) 665-8106

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TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Hartington/Crofton, NE, Amanda Jertson pastor; (402)254-6606. SUN. 9am Worship (Hartington), 10am SS (Hartington), 11am Worship (Crofton).

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Commercial & Residential HEATING & COOLING KAISER Call Doug or Chris (605) 665-2895

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CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, 301 W. Franklin, Hartington, NE, (402) 254-6563 or 664-5310. Rev. Gary Kimm, pastor. SUN. 8:15am Church school, 9am Worship.

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