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A Spiritual Beacon Shines after Prison

At Rising Hope, two ex-offenders embark on new life journeys.



Former prisoner in solitary confinement, David Hudgens, left, teaches Bible study on Sundays.

By Ed Simmons, Jr.

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Photo by Ed Simmons, Jr.

Jeff Lisanick, who served 20 years in prison, is now a volunteer driving the church van.

His first day locked in solitary confinement, David Hudgens, 48, serving two-and-a-half years for four nonviolent felonies, discovered a Bible under his mattress.

Confused, raging, he hurled it against the wall. It fell to the floor of the narrow, cramped cell.

Three days later, his fury ebbing, with no one to talk to, nothing else to read, he picked it up. Looking back, he recalls his motivation, “I’m going to read this like a John Grisham novel just to pass the time ... but God had a whole different purpose.”

He found himself identifying with Joseph in the Book of Genesis, whose misfortunes aligned with a destiny serving God. He realized in his own life, in his own discovery of the love of the Lord, “Everything had to happen just like it happened.”

He read the Bible from cover-to-cover six times before his release in May 2013. Finding himself next at Kennedy Shelter on Route 1, he saw a church van pull up Sunday morning. The volunteer driver, Marlon White, urged him to come to Rising Hope. He’s been attending ever since.

“My first impulse when I got there was ‘I am home.’ It was the true Word that they were bringing, the realness, the openness, the true compassion for the downtrodden,” Hudgens said.

Another ex-offender who found a spiritual home at Rising Hope is Jeff Lisanick, 48, who served 20 years for drug-related involuntary manslaughter. Like Hudgens, fresh out of prison he too was picked up by the Rising Hope church van at Kennedy Shelter. He too found himself drawn to the ministry of the Rev. Keary Kincannon.

“I really like his inclusiveness, his reminding us that the love of God excludes no one. It’s a very welcoming message, it’s what people who are struggling need to hear,” said Lisanick.

Today, both Hudgens and Lisanick find themselves drawn to helping others. Hudgens, who discovered he’s a gifted speaker, is teaching Sunday morning Bible Study. Lisanick, who also finds himself enabled to talk about the Lord, is now the volunteer van driver making the Sunday trip to Kennedy Shelter.

“I believe when God blesses you, it’s your responsibility to bless others in return,” said Lisanick.

At Rising Hope, said Hudgens, the pastor, congregation and volunteers support “the true mission of Jesus — to seek and save the lost.”

Finding success at helping others at Rising Hope, Hudgens and Lisanick have re-entered the world building new lives.

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