

YUGM Continues Its Commitments

A Brief History of the Mission's Leadership

The Yakima Union Gospel Mission, born out of the Great Depression, was launched in 1936 by some visionary Christians meeting at First Presbyterian Church. In September 1937, during a chapel message by Dr. Charles Ghormley, an alcoholic named Jimmy Wahlbrink was forever changed through a personal relationship with Jesus. Jimmy Wahlbrink would in 1939 become the Mission's first Superintendent.

Following Wahlbrink's death and a period of transition, the board would invite **Roger Phillips** in 1968 to leave his home-building business in California to serve as the YUGM Superintendent. Roger's father, Cliff Phillips, had moved his family from Chicago in 1945 to start the Fresno Rescue Mission, and Roger had a front-row seat to his father's vision and role in launching 16 new missions. Now Roger would move his own family to Yakima to continue that vision to share Jesus' care for the homeless. As a builder, Roger led the development of a family shelter, a dental clinic, a camp, and a youth center to serve the growing needs.

In 1988, Roger's son Rick would leave his successful construction business to join his father at the Yakima Mission. In May 1990, following a fire which decimated the Mission's new location downtown, the community wrestled with finding a new home for the Mission amid "not in my backyard" concerns. In 1993, the run-down, former Yakima Inn on N First Street was purchased for the next season of ministry and began its work there in 1996.



In 1997 **Rick Phillips** would become the Mission's Executive Director while Roger would step back and support. Under Rick's leadership YUGM would begin its recycling program, open its first thrift store, and build a state-of-the-art medical and dental facility. In addition, further development and beautification would mark Rick's season of leadership.

In 2018, 50 years after the arrival of Roger Phillips, and following Rick Phillips' retirement, **Mike Johnson** would come as CEO and lead Yakima Union Gospel Mission through an important process of evaluation, which resulted in a more focused mission statement, intentional team building, significant financial growth, and an outcome-orientation that utilizes data-informed decision-making. During Mike's season of leadership, the Mission opened two additional thrift stores and grew to 165 employees.

Following Mike's resignation in 2024, the board has asked **Scott Thielen**, formerly the VP of Client Services Ministries, to serve as the CEO through this season of transition. Interestingly, both Scott and Rick are grandsons of Cliff Phillips and are cousins. While neither of them intended to be involved in homeless work, God had a plan. Scott came to YUGM in 2016 after 33 years serving as a pastor in Seattle and here in Yakima. His experience and relational skills will serve to prepare the Mission for its next season of impact.

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Our Core Commitments

What do our leaders share in common? Above all, the Mission has and continues to be about following Jesus in helping people move from homelessness to wholeness. **That is our unchanging commitment.**



YUGM will continue to...

- ...believe and live out the Gospel as we have for 88 years.
- ...offer prayer, Bible study, and spiritual care for our clients.
 - ...provide outreach into the community.
- ...offer safe and open space during the day for people with nowhere to go.
 - ...provide safe nightly shelter for adults and children.
- ...invite clients into a long-term residential program of recovery and Christian community.
 - ...facilitate pastors gathering for relational encouragement and prayer.
 - ...partner with churches as an expression of local church outreach.
- ...include client participation in Celebrate Recovery, a Christian recovery community.
 - ...include local church attendance as part of our recovery process.
- ...partner with government and other agencies in good faith for the sake of those in need.
 - ...function as a food distribution service to community food banks.
- ...serve meals free of charge to those who come to us for shelter and support.
 - ...reflect the Gospel and values of the Mission in each of our thrift stores.
- ...serve the medical needs of the uninsured and underinsured through our Care Center.
 - ...seek organizational protections for religious freedom.
- ...live out our purpose by following Jesus in helping people move from homelessness to wholeness.

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Philosophy of Care

The leaders of YUGM share the following concepts which define our philosophy of care:

Be Gospel-centered

As a faith-based organization there can be some confusion about what “Gospel-centered” means for our guests. Do we share the love of Jesus with our clients? Absolutely. Do we require someone to believe as we do? Absolutely not. We will gladly serve anyone in need, regardless of what they believe. When we offer to pray for someone, it is usually welcomed. When we offer to share from God’s Word and sing songs of praise, many of our shelter guests choose to join in. And when someone enters our long-term residential recovery program, we explain that this is a faith-based program, and we will never force a person to believe as we do. But, almost always, after living in a healthy, Christian community for a year or more, our recovery clients choose to follow Jesus and become part of a local church. No one is shamed for choosing otherwise, merely loved unconditionally. ***This will continue.***

Meet people where they are, but invite them to change

Our staff and volunteers have the privilege of meeting people living on the street in unsheltered homelessness, inviting them into the safety of shelter, encouraging them to take steps toward recovery and health by entering our recovery program, and then supporting them as they re-enter society with jobs, housing and hope for the future. We call this our 5-Space Model, intentionally engaging people where they are and inviting them into baby steps of change. We literally get to watch God rescue people in the totality of their life: physically, emotionally, mentally, volitionally, and spiritually. Everything we do to help our clients occurs with the 5-space model in mind. Our staff are always looking for a way to walk with each client through these change spaces. ***This will continue.***



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Lead by role rather than rank

Christ is the ultimate servant and calls His followers to serve and lead as He does. There is no place for the use of power, authoritarianism, or intimidation in the work of YUGM. We are called to understand and serve our duties as a function of organizational role, not as an entitlement provided by rank. We all choose and are held accountable to submit to the policies and procedures that govern our teamwork and collaboration. When conflict occurs, we resolve it according to our policies and in keeping with our relationship as fellow believers in Jesus. ***This will continue.***

For Consideration

We are seeing more unsheltered street homeless and more new faces than ever. Substance abuse is still a huge problem, along with mental illness, but we are also seeing the reality of economic homelessness as more people struggle to find affordable housing. But, in the face of these challenges, we continue to seek the Lord's wisdom and blessing through prayer. ***This will continue.***



Live Our Core Values

The Mission has always been a place where anyone and everyone is loved. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). However, love must also be enacted. To this end, the staff and volunteers of YUGM seek to live out three essential core values. ***These will continue.***

Love

The sacrificial, all-consuming love of Jesus Christ is our motivation and example, and it's that nurturing love we strive to share with all those we meet.

Professionalism

We combine that love with professional training to effectively help adult survivors of severe childhood trauma. Our staff receives training in mental health first aid and trauma-informed care. Continuing education in this area is required of our staff to continue developing the best care for our clients.

Outcomes

Love and professionalism produce exemplary results for those we serve. We rigorously measure all of our programs for quality and effectiveness. Our recovery graduates have a long-term sobriety rate that is five times the national average of other drug treatment programs. God has given us the passion and the desire to continually improve our services. As there are lives and souls in the balance, we cannot afford to overlook any way to increase the success rate of our programs or introduce new services.