



# GATEWAY MISSION

# MINUTE

NOVEMBER 2023

## WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE...

BUT IT REVEALED GATEWAY'S IMPACT AS NEVER BEFORE



### Volunteer Couple at Gateway Mission Pantry Recalls Dramatic Fire

When a fire broke out at Gateway Mission's commercial-sized pantry earlier this year, the disaster shocked staff, volunteers, and guests. Yet unexpected benefits soon became evident.

"Yes, we had a huge mess to clean up," said executive director Jay Riemersma. "But God used that situation for good."

Months prior to the incident, in September 2022, Jana Gale and her husband, Dennis, had decided to get more involved at Gateway. They had been donors for over a decade, but, in nearing retirement, they approached staff member Katie Taylor about how they could assist.

Katie brought Jana to the massive pantry at Gateway Mission Men's Center, which is centralized to also serve the Women and Children's Center nearby. Gateway kitchen staff use fresh and non-perishable food in the pantry to prepare over 100 meals, three times per day.

That fall, donations for Thanksgiving had started to come in—which, to Jana's eye, were not in proper order. "They needed a lot of help," said Jana. "I was a deer-in-the-headlights walking those pantry aisles. Though I felt that was where the Lord wanted me, I didn't agree right away."

She told Dennis about the job's scope. When he agreed to help, Jana told Katie they were in.

During the Thanksgiving season, the pantry reached peak use, as Gateway serves tens of thousands of

meals. It made organization difficult, and the Gales wanted to start from scratch. But getting to know a few of Gateway's guests along the way energized them.



"Hearing from some of the men, either in a program or doing short-term community service, we saw the impact Gateway has," said Dennis. As the holidays shifted to a new year, they would need that energy.

On Friday, January 20, deliveries had just come in. "During the Christmas season, a lot of charity partners, donors, schools, and churches run food drives for us," explained Jay Riemersma. "So the pantry was full of all these perishable goods."

Then an electrical fire originated from a light fixture. It was quickly extinguished, due to a sprinkler located only two feet from the source. "We're thankful the emergency system kicked in, but it sprayed three to four inches of water throughout the pantry which flowed down the hallway," said Dennis. "A lot of cleanup needed to be done."

#### God Used It For Good

Riemersma put the word out to the Holland community, inviting news crews in to see the damage to Gateway's central pantry. The Ottawa County Department of Health directed that much of the stored food be disposed of and defined a process for some food to be saved.

# THE GATEWAY SPOON Café & Grill IS OPEN!



Next time you're in Holland, you can skip Starbucks or Bob Evans—and head straight to Gateway Spoon Café and Grill, now open for your dining enjoyment! Following a year of preparation and training, this restaurant offers both dine-in and to-go options for breakfast and lunch, featuring meals made with fresh ingredients from local farmers. And the proceeds all go to support Gateway Mission's work.

Whether you're grabbing a latte and croissant on your way to work or sitting down with your family for Sunday brunch, the Gateway Spoon (currently open Wednesday to Sunday) has something for everyone. It's an inviting community space—including a meeting room available for reservations—and some of our Gateway program graduates are part of the launch team, with other team members to come.

It's on the same city block as our 24th Street headquarters and the Gateway Store. Gateway Spoon also has a similar purpose to that business, to help support the life changing programs and services of the mission. "Gateway Mission offers on-the-job training to students in our programs, to help them build their employment skills," said executive director Jay Riemersma. "It really sets them up to succeed in the workplace."

As part of our efforts to draw the community to this restaurant, Gateway Spoon has partnered with the Holland Area Arts Council to decorate our walls. A different local artist will be featured each season, with a showcase event highlighting new artwork to occur every three months. See [GatewaySpoon.com](http://GatewaySpoon.com) for the latest info. Come and eat hearty—it's for a good cause!

 *We Didn't Start the Fire continued:*

Overnight, the Gales helped organize an army of volunteers. "About 50 pallets of food had to be sanitized and dried," said Jana. "So many volunteers came out from the community. We saw in their response how critical that Gateway is to Holland and to this county."

For once, that massive pantry space—measuring 40' x 40', with four vertical shelves—was empty. The Gales saw an opportunity to realize a months-long dream: to sort food categories from the ground up and implement next-level organization.

Jana explained: "Dennis and I met with the chefs and asked, 'How can we make this better?' So we organized it to make their jobs easier, putting things that they need on a daily basis in the most accessible places," said Jana.

As lighting was replaced and every square foot cleaned, food donations came pouring in from families and individuals across the area.

"Literally, in a matter of a few days, we had replaced all of those goods—and then some," said Riemersma. Guests didn't miss a single meal thanks to the all-hands-on-deck response. "It's a true testimony to the people in West Michigan, their overwhelming generosity and support."

## WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S CENTER: NEW LIFE

At Gateway Mission, not only are lives being renewed, new lives are also being welcomed into the world.

We currently have 34 children living at the Gateway Mission Women and Children's Center. These mothers and children often come with very little or nothing at all. Recently, we welcomed newborns to two mothers that are in our long-term Forge Program. Thanks to the courage of these mothers seeking help and your generous support providing the resources, counseling, and skills training, these precious little ones have a greater chance of thriving.

Join us in thanking the Lord for these beautiful babies!





## THRIVE STUDENT STORY:

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### **CATIE SMITH**

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Catie grew up in a home where violence was sadly common. Her father struggled with bipolar disorder, and when her mother remarried, there was no reprieve. Sadly, their neighbors were no help either as they falsely blamed problems in the apartment complex on Catie and her mother. In the summer of 2021, with the pandemic still affecting families and the economy, they found themselves kicked out and in need.

Catie shared that when she hit rock bottom, “I just broke. I had never pictured myself at that point. My family and I had always struggled with money, but I had never thought we would be at the point of actually being homeless.”

But now she confidently testifies “that God works in mysterious ways.” Her pastor at the time used to coach one of the Gateway team members back in the day, so even though she had seen so many poor relationships in her youth, she felt comfortable enough to join the Gateway Mission program.

When she arrived, everything changed. “My very first night here, as soon as the door closed on my room, my emotions just went, ‘Whoosh,’ and I felt safe,” she confided. Since beginning Gateway’s Thrive program, Catie experienced healing from past traumas through counseling and support groups, and even stopped having seizures—which had plagued her since childhood—without the aid of medications. She credits the healthy eating and life-style she has developed in the program.

Catie has also been given resources to help her forge a strong foundation for her life moving forward. “I’ve built up a large community of brothers and sisters” who support and protect her. She has also jumped into serving at a local church and in the kitchen for other Gateway guests.

“Since coming to the Mission, I am finding myself—finding a career path I can take,” Catie shared excitedly. “I’m just starting the manager certification for ServSafe” which will open doors for restaurant manager positions.

“I can see more of a purpose in my future—getting a career under my belt in the kitchen, even working alongside great chefs.”

In reflecting on Gateway’s impact—your impact—Catie concluded, “There’s so many people hurting that have had traumatic things in their lives that need this place. And I’m sure they can find what they need here.” Thank you for helping make her story, and countless more possible!



A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## BRINGING *peace* ON EARTH

In this Mission Minute, we've shared stories of divine intervention—such as how a fire drew us closer to many in the community—and initiatives like The Spoon Restaurant that will have an impact for years to come.

But I want to draw you back to where our focus always is: the remarkable people who choose to come to our door—and our desire to connect each person to the Prince of Peace.

If you feel the holidays are a chaotic time for your family, with travel, in-laws, and parties, consider someone who has had to live on the streets.

A woman we'll call Jessica shared this testimony of her Gateway Mission experience.

She said: "When I see other moms yell at their kids at the top of their lungs, it reminds me that I used

to be that way. I've learned how to handle chaos by living here. I've learned how to hold it together. I was raised by parents that would fly off the handle. And I don't do that anymore."

Jessica's story speaks to how we at Gateway focus on more than just immediate material needs. Beyond a good meal and temporary comfortable shelter, we create an environment defined by calm.

Every day, we operate with a routine, a regiment, and personal discipline. It really helped this young mom come out of a chaotic environment and envision more for her family. She realized: "No, wait a second, I need to just relax. My kids are watching me."

Another recent guest, Devonte, had this to share after participating in one of our programs: "I am happy here because I stay calm. And I'm not all over the place. I feel better inside."

So many of our guests come out of chaotic environments. But when a woman comes into one of our shelters, it may be the first time she knows she has value and worth. Maybe that young man has never seen true love and nurture.

Those experiences lead to additional conversations that can ultimately lead to lasting life change, which is what we're trying to accomplish.

As a partner of Gateway, I want you to know: when you give a gift, you're helping to restore families. It's helping meet not only the physical needs of individuals, but also the emotional, spiritual, and relational poverty.

Lives transformed by the gospel are amazing to see! Thank you for your part in bringing peace on earth.

Faithfully serving,

Jay Riemersma | Executive Director

