

CHRIST'S HOME Connections



FRONTLINE

I often get “raised eyebrows” when I talk with people about Christ’s Home. That usually happens, for example, when I mention that we’ve been serving children for 112 years! That’s a long time, to be sure. People are surprised to learn we’ve been around that long!

Caring for children is one of God’s passions, and was demonstrated by Jesus. In Luke 18 we read: “People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus’ disciples tried to stop them? They obviously thought that Jesus didn’t have the time, or wanted to be “bothered”, to spend some time with the children. Boy, were they wrong! For 112 years Christ’s Home has been carrying out the heart of Jesus to care for children with the same level of love and compassion that he demonstrated.

This is done every day by the faithful staff we call House or Teaching Parents. These staff members live in the home with the children 24/7/365 to make sure the children are provided for, nurtured, and loved in the name of Jesus. They, in their own real and practical way, help to make Christ’s Home a place known for Caring, Compassion, and Community. Many of the children we serve are experiencing this reality for the first time in their lives.

This issue of CONNECTIONS is about our Children’s Services program. You will read what it takes to be House Parent on a daily basis. You will be inspired to read the story of a man who was one of the kids at Christ’s Home and what God is doing in his life today. And, you will learn how you can be involved more fully in supporting the special programs that take place each summer at Christ’s Home.

Thanks for joining us as we welcome and serve children in the name of Jesus.

John Bryant
CEO



The Toughest Job They’ve Ever Loved

By Jay Gordon

There are easier ways to make a living than being house parents at Christ’s Home—but perhaps no better way to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

In 1961, one of John F. Kennedy’s first acts as the newly elected President of the United States was to issue an executive order creating the Peace Corps. He envisioned an “army” of young people serving their country and promoting the cause of peace around the world by living and working in underdeveloped countries. This army would be trained in public health, and would help build roads and schools, and teach everything from farming to math and science. This army would be called the Peace Corps.

But Americans were slow to grasp the concept, so Kennedy turned to an advertising agency to help convey, in simple terms, the spirit and purpose of the program, as well as its hardship and rewards. The agency created a series of public service announcements using the tagline, “the toughest job you’ll ever love,” and within just a few months, tens of thousands of young people were signing up.

No offense to the Peace Corps, but they’ve got nothing on being a house parent at Christ’s Home (see box, below).

The average day starts before dawn for most parents, getting their kids up and ready for school in time to catch a bus that could come as early as 6:15 a.m. There are doctor and dentist appointments, cleaning and cooking and laundry to be done. When the kids come home from school, there is homework, dinner, family time, and baths or showers to manage. There often is paperwork or appointments with case workers to cram into the daily routine as well.

In the “mommy-baby” cottage, where single mothers (and mothers-to-be) live, there are additional responsibilities: dropping off and picking up children from daycare, and mothers from work (typically on different shifts). “It is busy from the moment you get up until the

moment you go to bed,” says Ambra.

That pretty well describes an average day for house parents Rob and Katrina Williams as well—but then comes Thursday.

“Thursdays are our craziest days,” says Rob, “because the parents of the children come to visit on Thursdays.” While they love seeing children having time with their (biological/real) parents, Thursdays always carry an extra measure of stress for



Christ's Home house parents Rob & Katrina.

Rob and Katrina. “The children have been listening to you all week, and then mom and dad come and they’re listening to them also. Emotions are high, but you have to be gracious to the parents, and help them understand that we are a team. It’s an adventure.”

Michelle McKinsey would agree completely. She and her husband Jake have been house parents for the past two years, and she says parental visits add another layer of complexity to family life. “We get to build relationships while we supervise those visits,” she says, “and often we are teaching a mom how to parent their kids—because she’s never experienced good parenting herself

Lifting the heavy baggage

Of course, parental visits aren’t the only challenges house parents face. There are the everyday stresses that most families endure from time to time—visits to the ER, not getting enough sleep, and navigating the variety of parenting styles required to meet the needs of different children, for example. But there also are challenges and adjustments that are unique to house parenting.

“Realizing the baggage that comes with a lot of these kids is the heartache, and the heartbreak, of what we do,” says Ron Pettibone. He recalls a 16-year-old girl who decided to run away just a few days after coming to the cottage. Ron got in their van and went after her. “She said, ‘I’m not getting close to you people, because every time I get close to somebody, they leave me,’” he says. “I told her that here, she would leave me before I would leave her. To this day she is still with us. I look at her life and I thank God she didn’t walk off the campus that day. Kids come

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The heart of Christ's Home is to serve the Lord by providing services to senior adults and disadvantaged children in an atmosphere graced with love, dignity, compassion and respect.

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Christ's Home is a qualified member of and participant in the United Way Donor Choice Program. You may contribute to United Way through payroll deduction or by giving an outright gift. Please be sure to ask for a Donor Choice Form. For the Southeastern PA region (Delaware Valley only) our number is: 00981. All other regions must use our national number: 007689

Christ's Home is a 501 (c)(3) organization. Gifts are deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.

The official registration and financial information of Christ's Home, Inc. may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. (Certificate of Registration No. 13865)

Registration does not imply endorsement.

The Toughest Job They've Ever Loved *(continued from page 2)*

here with a lot of baggage, and every little incident can trigger a memory for them, even when you're trying to do something positive."

Many of the unique challenges of house parenting have to do with the flawed and broken system of courts and agencies that oversee services to at-risk kids. "The hardest thing is when you know that these kids need more from Christ's Home, but the judge and the 'system' decides to send them back home," says Ambra Pettibone. "And once they get home, they're broken again, and the pieces are not put back together, and you know things would have been so much better if they had just stayed here."

This is the most difficult part of house parenting for Katrina Williams as well. "Once you develop a relationship with these kids, your heart aches for them, and you want the best for them," she says. "You think you know what's best, but then you have to deal with the county, and caseworkers, and the possibility of having to send them back home—it just does something to your heart. There are exciting times when a child leaves, but it's disheartening when they move in and out of the [foster care] system. That's hard."

Making a real difference

So what is it that makes house parenting a little bit like the Peace Corps—"the toughest job you'll ever love"? For house parents, it is the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of children.

"My favorite moments in the cottages are when the kids are settling down for bed, and we read a book or devotional and pray with them," says Michelle McKinsey. "You've been through a long day, there's been a lot going on, but I can hug you good night and tell you that I love you, and I will be here in the morning. The look on their faces when they realize that—when they can see that we really do love them—is priceless."

Hugs are satisfying for Katrina Williams, too. "When we come on shift, and the kids are excited to see us, and all of the hugs and love that go with that—it may seem like a small thing, but it brings me a lot of joy," she says. "But the most rewarding thing for me is when children make the decision to trust Christ—when you see them grow from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity, and start to understand the gospel message."

The emotion wells up in Ambra Pettibone when she

THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER

Christ's Home house parents often make the point that their ministry is almost as much to the parents of the children they care for as it is the kids themselves. Michelle McKinsey demonstrates the point with a story about Christmas 2015.

Two of the children in Michelle and Jake's cottage were about to be adopted, so they invited their foster family over to spend Christmas with them. "We ended up with 24 people in our cottage!" she says. "It was crazy, but it was joyful, and such a great opportunity for these kids to have a normal Christmas with their family." The children helped decorate the Christmas tree and the house, and also helped prepare and serve Christmas dinner. "The (adoptive) parents and their family members were so overjoyed that they could have this day with their kids," Michelle says. "It was the best Christmas I have ever had, and definitely one of the highlights of our two years here."



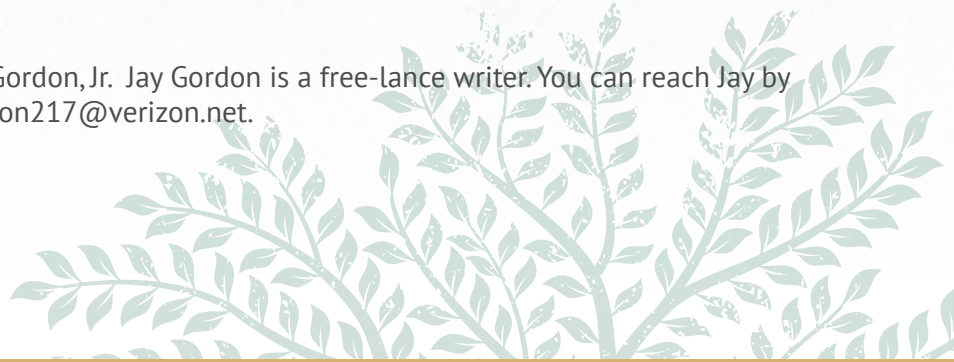
recalls three siblings who went home to live with their parents after spending several years in the cottage. “A year later, one of them called me and said, ‘Memaw, I’m pregnant. What do I do?’” she says. “That she would call me, and I would have an opportunity to go see her, and minister to her, that’s when you know you are making a difference. Even though we don’t always see it, we are making a difference.”

Her husband Ron finds great satisfaction when their kids realize that he and Ambra really do care about them. “They get beyond all the hurt in their lives and they realize that, ‘Hey, these people are real. They do care,’” he says. He recalls a time a couple of summers ago when they were returning with their kids from a visit to a park. “We were getting in the car to come home and one of the girls said, ‘Well, you only do this because you get paid to do it,’” he says. “That bothered

me all the way back to the cottage. When we got back, I turned to them and said, ‘Look, before we go inside, I want you to realize something. I don’t do this job for the money. To be honest, I could make a lot more money doing something else. I do this because I want to pour my life into each one of you.’ To see them grasp that is one of my greatest joys.”

It’s important to realize, he adds, that being house parents is not a job or career. “It’s a ministry for us, and we believe we are called to be here,” he says. “These kids become our kids; they call Ambra ‘Memaw,’ which is what our grandkids called her.” He recalls when he would say, ‘Welcome home!’ to one of their 15-year-old girls when she came home from school. “She would snarl, ‘This is not my home, this is Cottage 14.’ And so I said to her, ‘When I’m here, it’s home to me, so while you’re here, you should make it home for you.’”

The articles on Page 2-7 were written by Jay Gordon, Jr. Jay Gordon is a free-lance writer. You can reach Jay by phone at 215.527.7813 or by email at jaygordon217@verizon.net.



SERVING AT-RISK KIDS

Christ’s Home was founded as an orphanage in 1903, and remains true to its roots by operating 9 cottages and serving more than 130 children annually. Cottages can have anywhere from six to 10 children, ranging from newborns to as old as 19. Each cottage has a set of “primary” parents who provide round-the-clock care for the children four days a week, and a set of “relief” parents who care for children the other three days.

“We try to create a family setting in each cottage so that children have confidence and stability,” says John Bryant, CEO of Christ’s Home. “Our house parents care for the children, clean the house, make the meals, help with homework, meet with teachers and deal with school issues—everything parents need to do to make the house a home for these children. Our house parents do an outstanding job of meeting the needs of the children God brings to us.”

House Parent Profiles

God sometimes calls the qualified, and other times qualifies the called. These short profiles of some of our Christ's Home house parents demonstrate how God has uniquely called each one to this ministry.

Michelle and Jake McKinsey



Christ's Home house parents Michelle & Jake.

Becoming house parents at Christ's Home was at once the most logical thing Michelle and Jake McKinsey could have done—and the most illogical.

“When I was three years old, my parents decided they would become house parents, and we moved to the Lancaster campus of Christ's Home,” Michelle says. “So I spent the formative years of my life at Christ's Home. The work my parents did, and growing up with kids who didn't have the luxury of a mom and dad to come home to each day, that really stuck with me.”

She spent some time working with children and young people in urban ministry, and when she graduated from college, she thought Christ's Home would be a great internship or part-time work opportunity. She sent her resume, but it wasn't until a year and a half later that Christ's Home called and asked if she would consider being a “floater”—support staff for all the cottages. She did that for three years, and in the meantime met and started dating Jake.

“He would visit me at work, and he fell in love with the kids and with the idea of ministry as house parents,” she says. “He had to convince me that once we got married we would be house parents together.” Two years later, they are primary house parents to five children, ages 2 to 12.

“A lot of people have trouble adjusting to living with another person in the first few years of marriage,” she says. “We put ourselves in the position of having to get to know one another on a different level, but then adding kids into the mix. It has been a huge challenge for us to learn how to parent together, and work together for the good of the kids.”

Ron and Ambra Pettibone



Christ's Home house parents Ron & Ambra.

Like Michelle McKinsey, Ron Pettibone also has some history with Christ's Home; he had a cousin who was dropped off the orphanage when he was two years old. Ron became “reconnected” to Christ's Home about five years ago when he contacted a friend from college whose husband was dying of cancer. She asked where he lived, and when he said Warminster, she said her daughter lived there—and worked at Christ's Home.

Ron and Ambra visited with the young woman, and were impressed by the ministry they saw taking place with the children. “I told her that if there ever was anything we could



do, we wanted to get involved,” Ron says. Just a few weeks later they received a call that there was an opening in one of the cottages—and the Pettibones haven’t looked back. Becoming “new” parents all over again after raising their own family may be hard for some to understand, Ron says the move to Christ’s Home “was a perfect time of transitioning for us.” Ambra agrees. “It’s exciting, really,” she says. “I never thought I’d go back to diapers, but it isn’t bad!”

Rob and Katrina Williams

Friends of the Williamses were house parents at Christ’s Home, and would often bring their kids to the church where Rob and Katrina attended. “We would work with the kids during our church’s summer camp, and on holidays we would volunteer and cook Thanksgiving or Christmas meals for them,” says Rob. He and Katrina soon agreed that if they had the opportunity to serve the cause of Christ as house parents, they would be interested.

Still, Rob had his doubts. “I didn’t know if we were qualified,” he says. “I had just gotten my high school diploma the year before, and all my experience was in retail sales.” He knows now that Katrina’s resume as a teacher of autistic children in the Philadelphia School District made them more than qualified to be house parents. “We prayed about it together, and she showed me how a lot of the work I did at church had prepared me for working with kids.”

The Williamses now care for six children ranging from 4 to 16. “We have Pampers, but there are also boyfriend-girlfriend issues,” he laughs.

Katrina says the experience of being house parents has been fulfilling. “It’s good to give back,” she says, “It’s good to show kids that there are better paths, a better way, out there, and to share Christ with them. Because no matter how much social work you do, without Christ it’s all for nothing.”

A Generous Thought

Two ways you can help Christ's Home in the future

By Vernon Wright

Through your Will or Trust

Christ's Home was blessed recently with two substantial gifts through personal Wills. These donors chose to treat Christ's Home like a member of their family by specifying a portion of their estate in support of the services we have been providing for 112 years.

A recent statistic shows a decline in the number of people age 55+ who have a Will or Trust. If the two people mentioned earlier had not prepared a will, thousands of dollars might have gone to state and federal estate taxes.

A Will or Trust provides guidance for where you want your final assets to be distributed, and leaves a statement of what was important to you. Do you want to benefit your family, church, alma mater, or a charity that aligns with your lifetime giving practice? Your Will can make sure your desires are met and your estate is used wisely.

An estate planning attorney can guide you through the process of knowing what assets are best to leave for family and what is best for charity. You can also request a free copy of our "Wills Planning Guide" that will help you through the process.

Please feel free to contact Vernon Wright, CFRE, CAP for materials that can help you with these and other planned giving ideas. Email: vwright@christshome.org; call: 717.687.9424 (ext. 102)

Through a Charitable Gift Annuity

A Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA) is a planned gift to Christ's Home that provides income to you or someone you choose for life. The rates are still significantly higher than CDs and most stock dividends. The rate of return is based on your age, and that of your spouse (for a two life CGA).

Here's how it works, you make a gift to Christ's Home and receive annual payments for the rest of your life. A portion of your donation is tax deductible in the year you make the gift, and a portion of your annual income from the gift annuity is free of income tax.

A Christ's Home gift annuity allows you to make a gift now that will provide support for our programs and services at the end of your lifetime.

Here are some examples of current CGA rates:

Age 65 – 4.7%

Age 70 – 5.1%

Age 75 – 5.8%

Two life gift annuities are slightly lower.

Call for a free illustration and to ask if a Christ's Home CGAs is available in your state.





Summer is Coming

By Cheryl Cirilo

Summertime. Eight magical weeks in everyone's mind, full of hope and promise and mystery. For adults, it conjures up memories of late mornings and long summer nights, playing outdoors, vacations with family. For children, it comes full with the excitement of possibilities tinged with the essence of boredom.

At Christ's Home, the staff work to bring balance to summer's expectations and wonder. The younger children may be involved in a number of activities, from school enrichment classes to a week of summer camp. Often, there is a week or two of Bible School or Youth clubs to add to the excitement. Staff adjust the summer schedule to provide a modicum of structure and mass of enjoyment in the homes. Staff will plan trips to parks, mini- "staycations" that allow them to take the children to locations that aren't part of the venue (like amusement parks, trips to the shore or mountains) picnics and outside activities.

Older Youth look at summer as a time to try out job skills, prepare for college (or independence), and sleep late (and stay up later!) The staff in those programs try to provide a similar amount of structure and fun. By summer, most of the children old enough to work will have found a job, so the staff begin to adjust their schedules to accommodate the

logistics of transporting children to work and to their other activities, while trying to find activities to bless the heart of a teenager.

Through it all, there are still the daily requirements that come with caring for children, doctors' visits and dental appointments, visits with family, therapy and caseworkers, often leaving the staff to wonder if the eight weeks will ever end!

After school starts (because that's when summer officially ends), both staff and children are given an opportunity to reflect on the highs and lows of the summer, and usually come away feeling, "IT was worth it." Now that is a mark of a good summer!

Ways to Help:

- Summer camp fund
- Amusement Park/ Event Tickets
- Summer Employment for Teens
- Swim suits, beach towels, and sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent
- Gas grills

Christian Movie Producer Gives Flashback of a Life Molded by Christ's Home.

By Vernon Wright

“I have vivid memories of the last time I saw my father. I was five years old and my parents were having another big argument, one that required police intervention. After placing my mom in the police paddy wagon for her safety, an officer turned to me and my two older sisters to ask if we wanted to go with our father or our mother. As one of my sisters made her way into the vehicle, I pled with my other sister to go with our mom, so we could all stay together. I never saw my father again.”

So began a challenging two year period in young Joe Knopp's life when he, his two sisters and his mother “bounced around a lot, living with various friends, family members, and even in abandoned buildings.” Joe, who is 42 years old now, recollected that his mom “couldn't really take care of us as she struggled with alcohol and other vices.”

Joe and his sisters and mother were living in the Kensington area of Philadelphia where they did get to Sunday School and church at the Bethel Temple Community Bible Church. When Joe was 7, a member of the church, and volunteer for Christ's Home, made arrangements for Joe and his sisters to live in safety at Christ's Home in 1981.

One of Joe's fond memories was being a “handyman helper” from an early age. He enjoyed hanging around and helping the staff at Christ's Home as they cared for the Paradise campus. To this day Joe is grateful for the role models they became in his life. When he was old enough, Joe got more involved at Christ's Home whether it be splitting wood, mowing the yard or pulling a tractor trailer to pick up fallen branches and make the campus look spotless.

Joe shared that it was during his years at Christ's Home that he heard the gospel and gave his heart to the Lord. At a

Sunday evening chapel service, he heard a preacher share the truth from Deuteronomy 31:6, that god “will never leave you or forsake you.” Joe desired to entrust his life to his eternal Father who doesn't change, and lean on the message of grace declared in Ephesians 2:8-9.

While acknowledging all the positive impact on his life at Christ's Home, Joe felt “a strong desire to be in the normal crowd,” to be with a family and not in a children's home. The opportunity to move off campus and live with a family came to fruition before his senior year of high school.

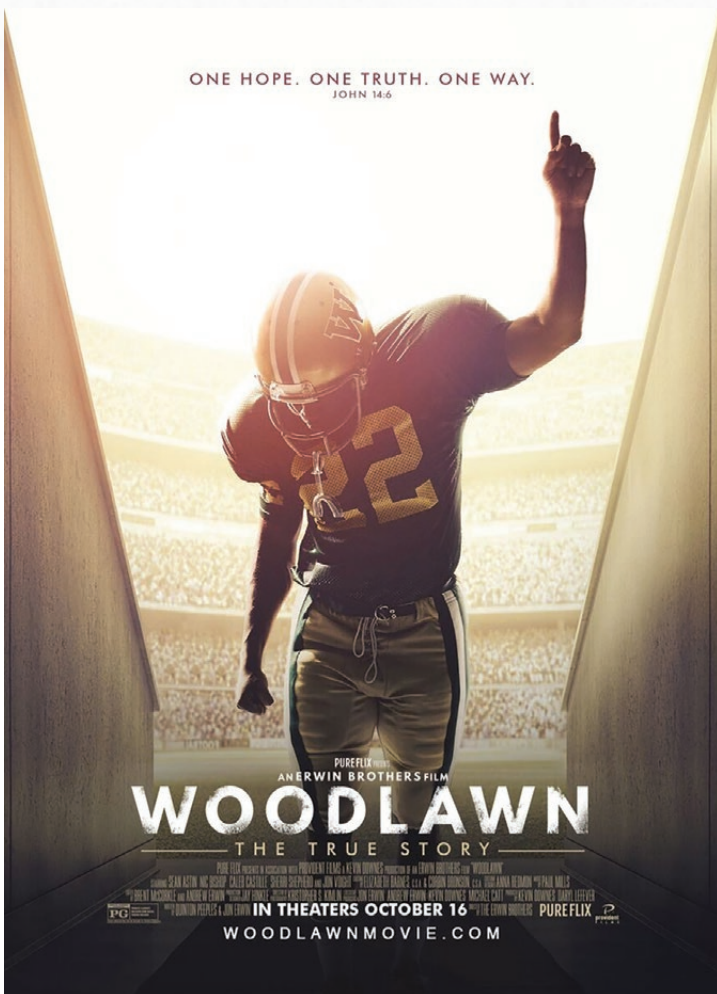
After graduating from high school, Joe entered the Air Force, and after finishing his military service, he settled down in Dayton, Ohio. Joe met his future wife Angie while working as an x-ray technician and attending college to become a financial advisor.

After 15 years in the financial services industry, Joe sensed that God was moving him in a new direction to have an impact on promoting the gospel. Through the counsel of a long-time friend, Joe accepted a unique opportunity in 2014 to join a Christian film company, Erwin Brothers Entertainment. Today Joe is a film producer, responsible for various business areas associated with the movie industry



including financing, marketing and publicity. Joe is thrilled to be involved in the entertainment industry with the goal of creating a context for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Joe promotes the movies his company is producing, he is

faithful to share his personal testimony and the role Christ's Home had on his personal development. Thanks to Christ's Home and his deep faith, Joe's life is like a great movie: deeply moving, heartfelt and headed for a happy ending.



“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

- Deuteronomy 31:6

Christ's Home

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