



U-TURN FOR CHRIST

Story by Christmas M. Beeler
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins

For the past 15 years, U-Turn For Christ has helped thousands of men and women find freedom from addictions through Jesus Christ. Partnering with Calvary Chapel churches, many program graduates have gone on to serve in full-time ministries, including some of the 14 ranches in the U.S.

As former addicts who experienced freedom through Jesus Christ, Pastor Gerry Brown and his wife Peggy founded U-Turn For Christ in 1994. They praise God for the thousands of lives and families that have been restored through the ministry, and they desire to see others experience that freedom. Gerry stated, "All over the world people are dying from addiction and going to hell. ... The answer is in Christ."

Hope for Women

Carmen Meza oversees the women's ranch in Perris, CA, where nearly 200 women a year graduate from the program. She often shares with them her own story of how Christ delivered her from addiction—through a personal relationship with Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the hearing of God's Word.

Carmen had lost everything because of her addiction to methamphetamines. She was living in an abusive marriage and had started using prescription drugs for the pain, and soon she was addicted. Seeing no way out, she moved on to illegal drugs. "I was overwhelmed with the abuse and with my life," she recalled. "I felt hopeless, helpless. I didn't want to live anymore." She left her husband, her children, her home, and her job to live with a man who supplied



During weekly visits, Carmen, left, spends time with participants and their families.



Carmen encourages a program graduate to trust the Lord with her marriage.



Peggy Brown, Pastor Gerry Brown's wife, greets Yvonne Kerwin with a hug.



Carmen Meza, women's ranch overseer at U-Turn For Christ, Perris, CA, encourages a participant to trust in the Lord. U-Turn For Christ is a supervised residential ministry of Jesus for those struggling with addictions. Participants are equipped to become productive members of their communities.

her with drugs. When he kicked her out, Carmen's mother and cousin brought her to the U-Turn ranch in Perris in early 2006.

"I was raised to believe in God and heaven and hell, but I didn't have a relationship with God," she recalled. "In coming to U-Turn, I really met Jesus here; I have built a relationship with Him." When she was invited to help with a new U-Turn For Christ in Hawaii, Carmen sought the Lord through prayer—a practice encouraged at the ranch. In the end, she felt that God wanted her to stay in Perris and serve. She now oversees the women's ranch. "I get to minister to the women and share my testimony," she said. "And I get to watch as God starts working in their lives and changing them."

She added, "It's a blessing to be able to serve Him. Looking back, I should be dead or in prison, but by God's grace and mercy I am still here, and I'm very thankful."

The Power of His Promises

What has made the biggest impact on her and others, Carmen said, is God's Word and prayer. At all the U-Turn For Christ ranches, participants are taught to pray and constantly study the Bible. Carmen commented, "On Wednesdays, we go to discipleship where the teachers expound on our memory verses and help us to apply them." Visiting pastors and their wives teach every week, which helps participants know that they are important in the family of God. "The Bible studies make a big impact in changing our lives because the ladies who

teach us talk about the issues we struggle with: surrendering to God, letting go of sin and the world, repenting, dealing with depression," Carmen said.

Carmen holds on to God's Word for herself and others. She cited Jeremiah 29:11-14, in which God promises that He has good plans for those who seek Him with their whole hearts. When she came to U-Turn For Christ, Carmen was struggling with fear, and God used Peggy to direct her to Philippians 4:6-8: to be anxious for nothing, pray about everything, and let His peace guard her heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

In trials, she finds strength in James 1:2-4, part of which says, "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the



Photo by Jason Joseph



Joel Weldon leads worship at the 14th annual Pig Roast picnic at the U-Turn For Christ ranch in Perris, CA. Many graduates return each year.



U-Turn Perris, CA, participants listen to Bible teaching at CC Romoland.

testing of your faith produces patience ... that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Carmen reflected, "The things I'm complaining about may be the very things He's using to mold me and shape me. If I call on Him and allow Him to walk with me, ... the end is well worth it."

The Draw of Addiction

People of many ages and backgrounds come to the ranches. Ranch directors say they have seen medical professionals, lawyers, housewives, homeless people, and teenagers come for help. Most struggle with drugs or alcohol, but some have come with addictions to pornography, gambling, or stealing.

In the past three years, Carmen has seen women from ages 18 to 72 at the Perris ranch. "Women become addicted for a variety of

reasons. There are girls who were raised in that lifestyle; there are women who lost their children and turned to drugs for escape. Many come who are addicted to prescription medications," she said. "For me, I did it to escape—because I had pain, and because I didn't want to feel anything anymore."

The problem is a spiritual one, Carmen said. "I had tried everything. God showed me that I was spiritually dead. Here, everything involves the Bible. There's no psychology or '12 Steps'—just one step: turning it all over to the Lord." She added that the Bible says no one can serve two masters. "Through the stories in the Word, we see our own stories again and again. We realize how much we have done, and how much we have been forgiven. ... That's why, when people graduate, they want to go out and serve the Lord."



Anthony Dowdy, assistant pastor for both U-Turn For Christ and CC Romoland, and his wife, Maribel, minister to families during visits at the men's ranch in Perris, CA.

Freedom to Serve God

Pastor Steve Nordgren oversees the U-Turn For Christ ranches for men and women in Greeneville, TN. “We’re just a bunch of people who had destructive lives, and God put the pieces back together. We’re just amazed that He can use us,” Steve said. “The Word of God is going out in power and changing lives. Men and women are saying, ‘Here I am, Lord. Send me!’ ... As Jesus said, those who have been forgiven much love much.”

He added, “Serving God is not about our strength or our ability—it’s about His ability. We need to get our eyes off the failures of the past and look to Jesus.”

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

Struggling with Surrender

Steve’s own story was not an overnight success. Though he accepted Christ as his Savior in prison, Steve had a difficult time staying clean after his release. Christians at CC Living Hope in Oceanside, CA, reached out to him for years and encouraged him to go to U-Turn For Christ. Finally, he went to the ranch in Perris, CA. He stayed for 18 months, graduated from the program, and then relapsed for two years. “Those were the worst two years of my life,” Steve recalled.

Finally, his friends from CC Living Hope and his family gave him an ultimatum—return to U-Turn For Christ or be kicked out of his mother’s apartment. Steve returned for a second time to the ranch in 2001; shortly afterward, his mother died. “One morning I got up early to pray. I couldn’t believe all the years I had given to the cruel one. I felt God ask if I was ready to surrender to Him fully. I said, ‘God, I’ll go wherever You want; I’ll do what You say.’ My life was not my own anymore.”

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

1 Corinthians 6:20

The Key to Endurance: Depend on God

Now, after walking in freedom for eight years and watching dozens of others being restored, Steve said, “The key to standing fast is having a total dependence on the Lord and not ourselves, staying utterly desperate

for God, and having a passion for Him. We must keep focused on Him as the center of our lives; otherwise, we’ll get off track.”

He added, “I have proven to myself that I’m very capable of failing. Trying to work out our salvation in the flesh—trying to be more like Christ by our own power—is a life of total frustration. Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He wants us to depend on Him.”

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28, 30

Removing Distractions

At the ranches, participants do not use televisions, Internet, or cell phones. “People coming out of addictions need to have a place where they can be free from distraction and temptation,” Steve explained. “I needed a place to get grounded in the Lord, to allow my roots to grow deep so I could stand strong.”

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly ... but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 1:1-2

“I have seen so many people change here because the Word of God is so powerful,”



Pastor Steve Nordgren, overseer of U-Turn For Christ Tennessee, speaks about Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount during a Saturday night Bible study at the men’s ranch.

he added. The U-Turn For Christ ranch in Greeneville, TN, can hold up to 30 at the men’s ranch and 17 at the women’s facility.

Rescued, Redeemed, Restored

A new life in Christ leads to more than simply staying clean, Steve said. “I have seen marriages that were broken come back together, children reunited with their parents. I have seen people who were totally helpless, and God restored them even better than they were before. I love being a part of it.” He uses the motto “Rescued, Redeemed, Restored” at his ranch to remind the men of their new hope in Christ.

He shared that, in his own family, many accepted Christ after seeing the change in his life. Also, God restored the relationship he had with his daughter. He was able to lead her and her boyfriend to Christ and later, to marry them. Now they also attend CC Living Hope in Oceanside, CA. “Isn’t the Lord good?” Steve said.

Having graduated from U-Turn For Christ, countless men and women now work in full-time Christian service, said founder and Pastor Gerry Brown.

Learning to Serve

“When you are a drug addict or alcoholic, your life is totally selfish,” said Gerry. “So when someone is born again, all of those aspirations change; you become a follower of Jesus who taught us to be servants of all.”

U-Turn For Christ—Restoration from Addiction

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection ... that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

Philippians 3:10a, 12b

Supervised residential ministry of restoration through intensive Christian discipleship

- **Phase 1**—Participants are given strict supervision at the ranch, sleep in large bunk-style rooms, work daily on crews, and experience immersion in God’s Word. A minimum stay of two months is required.
- **Phase 2**—Participants move to group homes, are given responsibilities at the ranch, get jobs in the community, and pay rent while participating in daily Bible teaching, accountability, and fellowship. This phase takes six months to two years.
- Initial two-month cost of \$800 is often covered by the participant’s family or sending church.
- Days begin with pre-dawn Bible studies in Proverbs. Enjoy Psalms in the afternoon, devotions in the evening, and several teachings throughout the week.



U-Turn graduates and supporters pray for Hirian Davis, who is attending the U-Turn For Christ Phase 1 at the ranch in Greeneville, TN. Those involved in addictive lifestyles must rely on the Lord to comply with the strict discipline.

“We wanted to help other people who struggled with addiction.”

Pastor Gerry Brown

Part of the program at U-Turn For Christ teaches men and women to serve God in a Christ-centered environment. As they serve at Christian facilities—like churches or food banks—they get a chance to see how Christians live and serve God. Gerry commented, “I thank God for Pastor Chuck allowing us to serve at the CC Bible College, the conference center at Twin Peaks, and CC Costa Mesa, CA. Program participants learn to serve alongside other God-fearing men and women. That’s a huge benefit.”

Pastor Kevin Hay has been involved with U-Turn For Christ for 10 years and oversees a small ranch in Old Bridge, NJ. He added, “It’s about learning to be a servant. When we take the guys to serve at a school or to shovel snow for single moms, we talk about those they are helping. They leave feeling proud of what they have done for the Lord, and they take that back home. If you take something out of your life, you have to replace it with something. It’s a lifestyle change.”

Taking on the identity of a servant—and not simply a former addict—is key to U-Turn For Christ, Kevin said. He added that Gerry has exemplified this attitude of servanthood, which has trickled down to the other leaders and participants. “Right after 9/11, Gerry brought 10 guys here, and they ministered to people. For the first eight months, he brought teams out constantly to share the Gospel and the hope of Christ,” Kevin recalled. “When the tsunami hit, they were out there. Now some guys from the Perris ranch are going to Indonesia. U-Turn For Christ is not about just staying off drugs; it’s a lifetime commitment to serving God.”

The Back Story

In 1991, Gerry and Peggy Brown were on the brink of divorce after years of drug abuse. After Peggy accepted Christ at a Calvary Chapel in 1991, she invited Gerry to come, and he also accepted Christ. They tried to find a Christian recovery center to help them stay off drugs and grow in their faith. “All the treatment centers were very expensive,” recalled Gerry. “So Peggy turned to prayer and reading God’s Word on a daily

basis, and those became a powerful part of her life. We wanted to help other people who struggled with addiction.”

At their home church, CC Hemet, CA, the Browns grew stronger through the verse-by-verse Bible teaching and fellowship. God restored their marriage and their family. They began serving at area prisons, encouraging those who wanted to make a fresh start, giving them a place to stay. Soon the demand for a full-time facility was apparent, and they found a property in Perris, CA.

After the Browns started the Perris ranch in 1994, word spread about the work God was doing. Soon, program graduates went out to start ranches in other states. Abroad, graduates have planted churches, started schools and orphanages, and opened more ranches. Countless men and women now proclaim the freedom they have found through a personal relationship with Christ.

Partnering with Churches

In the United States, there are 14 U-Turn For Christ discipleship ranches in 11 cities, four of which have women’s ranches. Several other Calvary Chapel churches are asking for U-Turns to start in their towns.



Erin Winemiller, administrative pastor of both U-Turn For Christ Perris and CC Romoland, baptizes a boy during VBS.



CC Romoland pastor and U-Turn For Christ founder Gerry Brown listens as Amanda recites a Bible verse at VBS. Gerry and his wife, Peggy, were delivered from drug

addiction through a relationship with Jesus and were later led to begin the ministry.

Photo by Jason Joseph

“That’s how it always works,” said Gerry, who now oversees the U-Turn For Christ headquarters in Perris, CA, and pastors CC Romoland, CA. “A Calvary Chapel will ask us to come and start a ranch in their area.”



Pastor Gary Hall, CC Greeneville, TN

Partnering with a solid, Bible-teaching church is essential, he said, so that participants can have a godly place to serve and graduates can have a place to continue to be disciplined. Some of the churches donate land or build-

ings. In Greeneville, TN, the director of U-Turn For Christ, Gary Hall, is a graduate of the program as well as the pastor of the local Calvary Chapel.

Also, participants build relationships with believers at the church, said Pastor Kevin from New Jersey. “A lot of guys who graduate from the program end up getting hired by someone from the church,” Kevin said. “It’s essential for them to stay in fellowship when they graduate.”

When a church contacts U-Turn For Christ to request a ranch in their town, Gerry and the pastor begin to pray that God would open the door for the staff, location, and finances. Then, as things come together, a new U-Turn ranch is born. “Right now, we are praying about several possible locations,” Gerry said. “We want to get the word out to churches that we are available, so they can let hurting people know there is hope.”

U-Turn For Christ

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Gerry prays with Ron after service at CC Romoland.

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