

VISION FORWARD



FIGHT FOR UNITY

In matters of politics, it's my personal conviction that as a whole neither the left nor the right has the moral compass to govern themselves, to call out their own, to hold themselves accountable, to admit to their own faults, to (in the words of Jesus) "take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5).

Collectively they embody what is true of all individually: we are quick to see the wrong in others, but not the wrong in us. The opposite is also true: we are slow to see the good in others, but not the supposed good in us.

We race to call out the other side for what they do and to excuse ourselves for what we do. We dislike them because of their differences and in quick order reduce them to those differences. We end up dehumanizing, demonizing them. "They" are always that way and we seek to divide them from us and to drive them away.

"And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." (Mark 9:25) It's easy to blame the other side. And maybe they deserve it. But the call for any of us who seek the good of the WHOLE house is to begin with our side.

Unity, and the pursuit of it, must begin with ourselves, not with our enemies. Whether in

society, in a family, or in a church, the fight for unity begins within, with me. Only from that position of honesty, integrity, and humility am I in a position to engage with my “neighbor”.

And who is my neighbor? The one you like the least and disagree with the most. We must (again, in the words of Jesus) “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

The command to love your neighbor was not original to Jesus. It was first given to Israel upon God’s deliverance of them from Egypt (Leviticus 19:18). God’s intent was to form a people after His own heart both in attitude and action. But before the command to “love your neighbor as yourself,” God gave the command to “not hate your brother in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17).

To “hate” your neighbor is not only to view but to feel and to act towards them as your “enemy”. You seek their destruction, if not in reality, then in your imagination. And all this happens “in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17). In other words, the battleground is the heart.

To “love your neighbor,” then, involves first a change of your heart towards your “enemy”. Love involves, first, a reordering of your deepest desires for and towards anyone you hate.

When the position and posture of “enemies” becomes one of love, then unity becomes possible. We become “neighbors”. As “neighbors” we will still fight with each other and often against each other, but we can do so *for* each other’s sake and *for* the sake of the whole house. In fact, there are issues and ideas we must fight about. But the goal is always to “dwell together,” not to tear each other down or apart.

Honest conflict and disagreement are a sign of health, whether in a home, marriage, relationship, church, organization, or society. Rather than hating each other in the secret of our hearts and allowing that to fester, we openly converse, disagree, debate. We communicate

with empathy and seek to persuade. But all along we *trust* that our intentions towards each other are good.

This kind of unity involves sacrificial love and death to self. Rather than crucify each other, we lay down our lives for each other. We seek to understand and to honor each other. When we do go too far, we are quick to forgive each other. We believe the best and endure through the worst. We seek “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”. (Galatians 5:22-23) Because where these abound all that opposes them can be overcome.

If we’re going to recover any meaningful sense of unity anywhere, and if we as Elim Grace are going to be a “united people, uniting people,” it must begin with us, not with our enemies. We must learn to search our own hearts first and to ask if there’s any wicked way in us. In place of any wicked way, as disciples, we must seek and ask for “the fruit of the Spirit” — the attributes, attitudes, and affections of Jesus — to fill our lives (Gal. 5:22-23).

Let’s fight for unity!

THE DESENS HOUSE

This past Monday we held our first Desens House board meeting. It was an exciting and humbling moment for me. A vision of over ten years is becoming sight.

The board currently consists of the following members, with one possible future addition:

Jonathan Evans, Chairman
 Chris Burritt
 Bill King, Head of Facility Committee
 Eric Bresee, Treasurer/Head of Finance Committee
 Shelly King, Secretary
 Joe Grasso, Administrator (non-voting member)

My goal in forming the board was to select and invite individuals with particular skill sets necessary to the success of The Desens *and*

with a good reputation in the eyes of the city. Partnering with our city is of the upmost importance to us.

Many of you don't know Eric Bresee, but Eric is the current director of Farnham and has become a personal friend. He brings a wealth of experience, wisdom, and knowledge to The Desens House ministry.

As Elim Grace, you also play a significant role in the birth and growth of The Desens House. It will be your prayers, time, and giving that make this ministry a reality. You stand, I believe, at the threshold of something that will change generations. We get to be a part of something new that God is creating. Remember, He is our Genesis God!

Here are four questions the Board has begun to discuss:

1. **Why do we exist?**

To set generations free from addiction

(My father was a drug addict who was set free. As a result, his children and grandchildren's generation were set free from addiction. The same is true of Pastor Bill and his children/grandchildren.)

2. **How will we behave? (Board members, Staff/Volunteers, the woman living at The Desens House)**

With humility

(We will be other-centered, considering others more important than ourselves)

With generosity

(We will look not only to our own interests, but to the interests of others. We will do so with generosity. Not only generosity of finances, but also of kindness, grace, forgiveness, time, skill, experience, etc.)

With courage

(We will take risks, asking not "will we regret not doing this in one year," but "will

we regret not doing this in twenty years?"; courage involves not only bravery but an informed understanding of what we're stepping into and the willingness to step into it anyway.)

3. **What do we do?**

We offer a family of support for women seeking a way out of addiction

(These women are 30 days clean, as referred to us by our partners Farnham, Harbor Lights, and others; they are looking to stay 12-18 months)

We will be a "family," not a network. The image of "family" lends itself to communicating a warm and welcoming group of people and/or organizations who are in this together all for the sake of the Desens House women. These groups include Elim Grace, The Desens House family of women and house moms, Amnesty Crossfit, Farnham, Harbor Lights, Victory Transformation, local businesses, and others)

4. **How will we succeed?**

Through partnerships

(We can't do it alone, we won't do it alone. For the sake of modeling unity, we will work closely with other like-minded groups and organizations, those mentioned above and more.)

Through personal responsibility

(Others can't do it for us. There must be personal initiative and investment of time and effort. All those involved will take personal responsibility for their part in helping the family succeed.)

Through faith

(We must believe in something or Someone higher than ourselves. Not all, maybe not any, who enter the Desens House will trust in Jesus. Our hope is that they will come to. But we will welcome them either way. Still,

they will need to understand that they don't have it within themselves to make it on their own. They will need faith in something or Someone beyond themselves to find a strength "not their own".)

So, what's next? Facility wise, as it stands now, we have completed the asbestos removal and have installed 52 new windows. Some interior demolition has already begun. This month and next we will be submitting a business plan to City Hall for their review.

Most Desens House expenses are now being administered separately from our Elim Grace Church budget. The hope over time is for The Desens House to become completely self-sustained and managed. It is certain, though, that Elim Grace will continue to support The Desens House as a local church mission.

Please continue to pray. We are still in need of a woman who would be willing to stay the night at The Desens House once it opens. We do have two daytime staff ("house moms") who have committed themselves to doing this!

There is much work to be done, so if you are interested in helping with the facility, please contact Pastor Bill. If you are interested in helping with fundraising, grant writing, and other financial ventures, please see Joe Grasso. If you have ideas for business development, life skill development, employment, etc., please see myself.

FEBRUARY PRAYER TARGETS

We continue to pray together, because we believe that prayer is the work important to all our work. By praying together God unites our hearts to Him and to one another. In this way unity can be established. Our three prayer targets for February are:

- 1) **For God to guard us and defend us from slander, gossip, and dissent in our marriages, families, relationships, and church** — We must fight for unity by fighting against slander and gossip. We must ask God to grant us a love strong enough for one another that we refuse these things, but choose rather to walk in

the light of grace, truth, and freedom.

- 2) **For a higher stewardship of our finances** — that God would grant us His freedom, His joy, and His wisdom for this. Every blessing is yet still a test of our stewardship. God doesn't bless and test for our failure, but for our success. He desires not only that we would be faithful in little, but also in much!
- 3) **For The Desens House Board** — for God's wisdom and the city's favor. The Desens House is only the first step in a much larger vision. We know that if we had the room we could easily fill up to thirty beds today. We pray for the first four woman and we pray for those to come. Pray for the Board to be able to think and to see one barrier *beyond* the one they're at.

RECENT VIDEOS

I'm working hard to be more consistent with keeping our vision before us. One way I'm seeking to do this is in the form of more videos. So, if you've missed these, here are our most recent videos:

- Marriage Together 2: Three ways to cultivate unity in marriage
- What are our 2020 goals?
- A 2020 First Goal: Stewardship Campaign

SELF-LEADERSHIP TIP

Time flitters away. Learning to manage your time is hard work. A tip, if you're seeking to better steward your time, is to identify a first, second, and third goal for the month:

- a first goal is *essential* (if I do nothing else, I *will* do this).
- a second goal is *anticipated* (I believe I should be able to do this
- a third goal is *possible* (I *hope* to be able to do this