

Grace Center Executive

Director

Linda Heitman

May 5, 2022

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Directors

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The landscape looks very different today than it did this past winter. The cold, grey days have been replaced by green and flowers. Spring is in full bloom, and we can see changes every day all around us. Spring is the season of change. The earth and trees are waking; growing and changing; preparing to bring forth the fruit of summer. The Grace Center is also going through a season of change. And we are excited to share these changes with you.

On March 1, 2022, I was hired as the new Executive Director of The Grace Center of Southern Oklahoma. You may have heard my background on the radio, on tv or in the newspaper. Or you may have taken me up on my offer to stop by the office and chat. I have met so many wonderful people in the past 2 months that it simply amazes me! This community has truly welcomed me with open arms when I needed a change.



I have a large photo on my office wall with one vibrant red maple tree embracing the fall and all the other trees in various stages of green and yellow. The caption below it says, "Change is not only inevitable, it is essential to survival. Why fear it or fight it when you can simply embrace it?" I love this. Because every word is true. Change is inevitable.

Change has also come to the Grace Center. Changes began almost as soon as I was hired. The first month, I evaluated every program and procedure. This was needed to see what was broken and determine how to fix it. One of my favorite things to do is solve problems. When I was in the process of hiring new staff, I asked everyone the same question....If I gave you a giant, tangled ball of yarn, how would it make you feel and what would you do with it? I was told many times, that was the strangest interview question they had every been asked. I simply smiled and waited for their answer. You see, if I were given a giant, tangled ball of yarn, I would be happy for hours. I would patiently untangle, unknot and unwrap it and create a new, smooth and beautiful ball of yarn ready to be

made into something useful. To me, it helps me bring order to the chaos. When a woman answered, "I'd crochet it up!" I hired her. That was what I was looking for. Someone to bring something good out of something many would simply throw away because it was too much effort or too overwhelming. That's why I love quilting. It is taking scraps that would normally be thrown away and turned into something beautiful.

I had a client ask me once why I went to all of the trouble of helping him. I told him, "Because when I needed help as a child there was no one to help me." This is why I have such a heart for the homeless. Actually, anyone that society has cast aside as worthless or too much trouble.

I see value in everyone. Especially those cast aside. My heart yearns to show them the unconditional, never ending love, mercy and grace of God. When I was at my lowest, He surrounded me in my mess with love and it changed my life. And now, I have the privilege of being used as an instrument of that same love, mercy and grace to change lives here in Ardmore. It is an honor to serve.

As I am sitting in my office writing this letter, there is a woman outside arguing with people only she can see. Inside the Day Center, our first onsite AA/NA meeting is getting started. The leader told me the woman used to come and was clean for several months and has now relapsed. My heart breaks for her. Another woman I spoke with this morning in the Day Center was huddled in a corner with her arms above her head. I got the distinct impression she wanted to disappear. I sat next to her and gently introduced myself and asked her how we could help her today. She peeked out of her arm to look at me and said everything you offer, I need. I just wanted to give her a big hug, but I knew it was too soon. Today, I counted it as a win that she looked at me and spoke to me. One day at a time.

Yesterday we started handing out sack lunches on Monday mornings because there are very few opportunities for the homeless to get a meal on the weekends.

This is why I am here. To make a difference. To share the unending love, mercy and grace of God. To meet people where they are just as God did for me. He was always there for me with an outstretched hand saying, "Come to me and I will give you rest from your burdens." No judgement, just love.

This is what we do. This is our calling. This is my mission field. I love the name The Grace Center. Grace is at our core.

Every change I have made was designed to fulfill our mission and share that beacon of light and hope that leads people out of the darkness.

The women I spoke with today will be back. As will many more. I pray for them and all of our clients as well as our staff for God to show his love and purpose with us and lead the outcast and broken back to Him. To truly help set the captives free.

But we can't fulfill our mission and vision without your help. We need volunteers, supplies and funds. We have volunteer opportunities for all comfort levels from answering the phone at the front desk, helping with the clothing closet and laundry, or simply sitting and talking with the clients. Listening to their stories. Letting them know they matter.

We need supplies for our sack lunches, hygiene packs, laundry supplies, coffee and fruit that we make available at all times as well as clothes, especially smaller men's sizes as we give out a fresh set of clothes with each shower.

We also need funds to pay staff and keep the lights on as well as funds to help those in financial crisis with emergency rent and utility assistance.

All donations matter and are greatly appreciated. Whether it is \$10 or \$10,000 it is valued. We can't do this without you. Can you help us today?

You can make your donation through our website www.ardmoregracecenter.com or mail a check. We are in the process of setting up a text-to-give program. Watch our Facebook page and website for details!

But for today, please make your contribution and help us continue to impact the homeless community of Ardmore. A self-addressed envelope is included for your convenience. Just add your donation and a stamp. Or go to our website. Easy peasy!

If you would like to schedule me to speak to your church or civic organization about our mission and vision as well as ways you can get involved, individually and organizationally, please contact me at 580-223-2027.

Thank you for your faithful and continued support!



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