

## The Prodigal Pastors and Provides

By Pat Sabiston

Even though Eddie Mansfield grew up in a Christian home, nothing in his religious upbringing resonated with him. He turned to alcohol and drugs to fill the void of nagging emptiness.

“At about 15, I began drinking alcohol and smoking pot,” Eddie said. “When I entered college, the drug use continued, and I never graduated. Even though my life was spiraling downhill, I continued in the drug scene until 2006.”

It was then the Lord gave Eddie a wake-up call.

“I got into trouble in Atlanta for dealing drugs, so I went to jail,” Eddie said. “I stayed there for seven months, and that’s where I was reintroduced to the Lord and got back into the Bible. After I was released from jail, I went to Haven House (an addiction recovery program) and stayed there for 18 months.”

Mansfield worked at Haven House for about a year following his incarceration, where he learned a lot about recovery programs. Soon after, in 2010, he became a board member of the Path of Grace in Walton County.

“When Path of Grace began to

have management issues, I took over the position of Director as a volunteer,” Eddie explained. “I remained as a volunteer in that position for several years, but in 2013, the board promoted me to the position of Managing Director.”



*Pastor Eddie Mansfield manages the growing operation of Path of Grace Thrift Store ministries in Miramar Beach and now Panama City Beach.*

As Managing Director, Eddie is tasked with running the Thrift Stores and overseeing the women’s program. Having graduated from a recovery program, he knows the value of having former students work within the organization.

“Several graduates have come on board as my assistants, and two are assistant directors. The other grads perform management and program-related duties,” Eddie said. “They help me run the entire program, which provides 50 beds and shelter for, on average, 47-50 women at a time.”

Path of Grace, which began in 2008, is a residency program for women desiring recovery from alcohol and/or drugs. Acceptance into the home and program is contingent on a person’s desire to change and a willingness to accept guidance and direction. Residents adhere to guidelines and activities designed around recovery and to build a firm foundation for life transformation. Christian principles are infused into the 12-Step programs of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous and used as tools for change in the residents’ lives. The program lasts from 16 to 24 months. The women are taught to be

self-disciplined, accountable for their behaviors, and responsible. They learn to adhere to peer support, structure, and service to others.

“We focus on the Lord more than anything to help our ladies. In fact, we are similar to a discipleship program, because we encourage women to get to know the Lord and then go out and share the Word of God. When they leave, they will know God in a closer way. We focus on the Bible and Jesus Christ, teaching how to turn away from darkness into the light. We also have two Christian therapists who work within the program.”

“The first house was built in Freeport in 2009 and had seven beds,” Eddie explained. “Every year we have grown a little by adding houses and beds to help more women.”

And grow they did!

“We’ve just built eight small habitat-style houses and will have Certificates of Occupancy to help mothers with children, enabling the women to reunite with their kids. We always allow graduates to use the homes as long as needed. In South Walton we have a sober-living community on a residential campus. In Bonifay we took over a church property we call Crown of Beauty. It’s 15,000 square feet with many rooms, so we’re able to house about 20 people. Then, we have Serenity Village in Santa Rosa.”

Thrift Stores are also a big part of the ministry’s bottom line.

“Of course we get monetary donations, but we get more financial support through our Thrift Stores,” Eddie said. “We use the money to help our residents and to grow

# Path of Grace

Recovery through Faith



*Path of Grace has several campuses housing women who have been given a second chance at reestablishing a healthy lifestyle with Christ as their firm foundation.*



the program. When our women graduate we give them money because most of our residents don’t have resources. Often they have been homeless or come directly out of the jail system. So, when they come in, they have nothing. However, when they leave Path of Grace, they have the

resources they need for a new start.”

In Panama City, a new Thrift Store will be opening soon.

“It will be located on 23rd Street in the Home Depot parking lot,” Eddie said. “We will use the Bonifay property for the ladies in the Panama City program. We hope to open up something in Panama City or near there. But right now, we’re trying to get stable, covering all the bases financially before we keep growing. We have another ten acres in Santa Rosa Beach, and are designing a 28-bedroom facility to house 50 more ladies.”

So this prodigal is passionate about ministering to others for the Lord, all the while being a good steward of the resources by remaining debt-free. The money received will be used to better the therapy and lives of the ladies they serve. They are grateful for any and all help, and always praise God for their growth and success.

Want to know more? Visit [pathofgrace.net](http://pathofgrace.net).

