

History of the Agape House of Vandalia

Our mission is to provide affordable overnight lodging to families of offenders in the state correctional centers of Vandalia and Bowling Green.

The need and vision of Rev. Ron Franklin, former pastor of the First Baptist Church, Vandalia, and Sister Eugenio Pastrick of St. Louis began in 1999. Families (even with children) were waiting along the highway, closed filling station, and gravel roads in hot and cold weather to be allowed on the prison grounds. The need of a clean, affordable, and safe house for family members to stay while visiting offenders in the correctional centers was underway. A Board was formed that included Sterling and Karen Holbrook; Janice Webb; Rev. Jimmie Stewart; Marie Kenyon, a St. Louis lawyer; Sister; and Rev. Franklin. After viewing several large homes in Vandalia that were not feasible, the Board purchased the closed Nazarene Church, the parsonage next door, and an empty lot for 19,000. After tearing the old dilapidated parsonage down at a cost of 4,000, the Board using several garage sale proceeds and several large donations began renovation of the old church. Many volunteers, including Paul Stone and Joe and Dewana Suddarth, worked on the project. The A.P.Green Foundation furnished funds for the storage shed.

The house; which consists of twelve bedrooms, six bathrooms, a large fellowship area with a kitchen, laundry room, and a manager's apartment with two bedrooms and baths, living area, and kitchen; opened in 2004 and now has served over 8,500 guests. The house was furnished with volunteer money or items and decorated by Karen Holbrook and Mary Orr.

The eleven Board members meet once a month. Board members are from Bowling Green, Farber, Ewing, Laddonia, Middletown, Montgomery City, and Vandalia. Seven different faiths are represented on the Board. There are three ex-officio Board members: Rev. Ron Franklin, Sister Eugenio Pastorik, and Janice Webb.

The house is open Thursday evening at 5 P.M. and closes at 9:30 A.M. on Sundays. The cost is \$5 per adult per night and \$2 per child per night. The cost to operate is approximately \$2500 per month and is partly defrayed each month by 15 churches and 3 individuals. The house is also supported by United Way of Audrain County and various organizations. The St. Louis Cardinals furnishes money for gas cards for families with children. We have reached out to many counties, more than half of the United States, and even the Netherlands. The house is managed by a full-time manager.

Churches, individuals, and organizations furnish snack items, cereal bars, coffee, cereal crackers, hot chocolate, soup, bottles of water, peanut butter, and jelly for the guests. The Board furnishes milk and bread.

Tours are available when the house is not open for guests. Board members are available for speaking engagements. Call the house number 573-549-6755 or Sterling Holbrook 573-249-4519.