



Ministry Member Spotlight

mercy heart

By Crystal Wright, Freelance Reporter

COOL DOWN

Sugar Cookie Fruit Tacos

- 1 pkg 18oz refrigerated sugar cookie dough
- 2 tbs cinnamon
- 1 cup whipping cream
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 2 cups of your favorite fruit cut-up

Mix & Make It

1. Preheat oven to 350° Grease 2 baking sheets. Cover rounded forms such as rolling pins or cardboard tubes from paper towel roll with aluminum foil.
2. Cut cookie dough into 16 half inch thick slices. Press each slice on a slightly floured surface into a 3 inch round sprinkle with cinnamon.
3. Bake cookies until lightly golden, but still soft, 7-9 min. Gently remove cookies from baking sheet, and IMMEDIATELY drape over forms.

It is easier to invert the forms, instead of laying cookie on top of the rounded form. Put 2 rolls next to each other and draped the tinfoil over them pushing down in the middle, then I place the cookie in the middle, they did not break that way... Clear as mud? Think tacos!

4. Cool until firm about 2 min. gently remove.
5. Beat whipping cream and sugar in large bowl with mixer on high until stiff. Scoop 2lbs into each cookie, then add your favorite fruit.

#COPEspotlight

This month COPE shines the light on an organization that serves families and loved ones standing on this side of the glass; those left behind by incarceration.

Background

Founded in 1995, Mercy Heart is a non-profit, multi-denominational organization for families of inmates and ex-offenders. Led by CEO Roger Hollar, this ministry has one mission:

"...to create a leading network of churches dedicated to partnering with families to find life beyond incarceration." MATTHEW 9:36

Behind the Scenes

We took a moment to speak with Roger about his mission, his retirement, and what he sees as Mercy Heart's future.

Q. Roger, as a pastor and current CEO of Mercy Heart, can you tell me a little bit

about your organization and what fueled your mission?

A. We (Mercy Heart) engage with churches in ministry, to partner with families to find life beyond incarceration. In 1991 I started going into prison. I was on staff at Glenview Church and I was going into prison with the Bill Glass Organization. I just started taking people with me (to minister to inmates), and it wasn't long after that, maybe a year or so, that several of them began asking me, "Who ministers to the families of these men and women?" We did a little searching around and really couldn't find anyone who was doing that, so we made a decision. We wanted to connect with families and make that our mission: to partner with, and help, these people find the ability to overcome the shame that they were facing and be able to grow in spiritual and family relations. And get ready for the eventual return home of a family member from prison.

Q. How did you get started?

A. We started at Glenview church in Ft. Worth. It was kind of the maiden voyage of Mercy Heart. We were just one program in Ft. Worth from 1995 to 2005. Then in 2005 we had several people approach us, encouraging us to share the work we were

doing with other churches. Now we are working with several churches across Texas.

Q. Speaking of other churches and ministries, at what point did you connect with COPE?

Sometime in the late 90's. I've know Johnny Moffitt for many years. He knows our work and he's been around for a long time. I've always had some familiarity with COPE and their work, but I would say it's about relationships. We connected with COPE because of the similarity...and the opportunity to connect with other ministries. It's an exposure to other groups who minister to inmates. At the time, and through the years there haven't been a lot of people who do what we do. The other ministries who are members of COPE may not do what we do but they all attend churches. That is who we are reaching out to; the church.

Q. What has been your greatest take away with regards to the need for the incarcerated after all this time?

A. My greatest take away is that the need is still huge. The need for families to connect and be a part of reentry is still huge. The whole inmate and family connection is still probably the largest mission field.

Q. Your season as CEO of Mercy Heart is coming to an end, but I understand that you are going to stay engaged and participate in this mission field. How is your role changing and what impact do you see Mercy Heart having in the future?

A. I feel like the work isn't anywhere near complete. My role will be, to do some writing and development of a Mercy Heart curriculum that will help to further impact the church culture. We are bringing someone in to help develop a more digital platform. The main way we have connected to our mission field is through Awareness Clinics.

Q. Tell me more about an Awareness Clinic.

A. We go into an area and provide invitations to a luncheon or a 45 minute presentation where we talk about the need. You can't do more than 4-5 of those a year. Based on what we need to do to get ready for those (financially) and the fruit is slim, so our goal is to engage churches. The 12-15 (churches) that we have partnered with, have enabled us to leverage thousands of dollars in facilities and resources that we wouldn't have had otherwise.

Q. What are up and coming plans for Mercy Heart?

A. We have 2-3 conferences that we are doing next year, just to talk about our ministry. We really have to engage the church. One of the things that's a challenge is that the church is ready to go in (to the prisons) and have a prison weekend to minister to the inmates. Then the inmates go home; it's a one and done. Those families have needs 24/7. Their needs don't go away. We want to help the family network and gain resources while their loved one is incarcerated and upon re-entry. One of our biggest challenges is figuring out what do we do once we get these families of the incarcerated into our program. We need to be doing something with them. One of the really critical pieces that we haven't been able to accomplish is to write curriculum. I have spent the last year writing curriculum and we are getting to a place where we can role that out.

Q. What do you hope for the future of Mercy Heart?

A. Going forward, we want to have a lot of resources available and for Mercy Heart to provide a curriculum nationwide. We are trying to put everything into digital format, or a video so they can just download it. That way everyone gets the same teaching and everyone is working on the same thing. That's one huge piece.

Q. And for COPE?

A. I hope, for COPE, that they continue to provide a forum for like-minded people to exchange what they do. I would like for them to do more conferences that involve churches; that they would reach out, specifically, to churches for involvement.

Thank you so much for your time and we, here at COPE, wish you all the best in your retirement. We look forward to hearing about what God is doing in your life and how you continue to positively impact those around you!



Roger W. Hollar

Executive Officer (CEO)
Mercy Heart, Fort Worth, TX
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Roger has over 35 years of executive church staff experience, serving in two churches during that time period. Since 1995 he has also served concurrently as CEO of Mercy Heart, applying his experience to lead churches toward compassionate Kingdom ministry with families of inmates and engaging prisons for weekend family encounters to promote family reunification and restoration. He and wife Dianne of forty plus years have two grown children and five grandchildren.

Author

Between The Walls: Ministry Between Prison and Church Walls a local church response to families in the crisis of incarceration (A church manual on ministry); many articles in various denominational and restorative justice publications.

Additional Experience

Board of Directors, Tarrant County Reentry Coalition, Fort Worth, Tx (2014 - Present)

Steering Committee, International Prisoner's Family Conference, El Paso, Tx (2013 - Present)

Volunteer Chaplain, Tarrant County Jail, Fort Worth, Tx (1994 - Present)

Prison Teammate Coordinator, Bill Glass, Between the Walls ministry, Cedar Hill, Tx (1992 - Present)

Executive Pastor, Glenview Baptist Church; Mercy Heart (Community Ministries/Local Missions); Staff Advisor [quasi-staff minister] (1988 - Present)

Vice President, Restorative Justice Ministry, Texas Baptist Men, Dallas, Tx (2009 - 2011)

Secretary, Board of Directors, Restorative Justice Ministries Network of Texas, Huntsville, Tx (2003 - 2012)

Conference facilitator at local, state and national restorative justice conferences sharing the message of ministry to at-risk families and children of inmates



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