



women waiting to be picked; but the Scriptures say, only those who anguish will sing new songs.

In time I realized we had to have a place where the women could come and cry, take a shower, share a meal, a cup of coffee. Genesis House opened in 1984; and we now have a staff of eight, plus volunteers. We see 50 women a week. Every morning we are in two Chicago courtrooms to talk to the women, offer intervention. We visit women in lock-up. We have six beds for emergency and short-term residency. We have weekly support groups as well as individual counseling. We develop job skills, give AIDS education. Our aim is to help women get a sense of their own goodness.

We live on the edge financially. But God is a God of back doors. I learned this in the '60s when I had come back to England from Uganda bursting with a calling to start a lay missionary movement. I talked to bishop after bishop and the answer was no.

I eventually watched the Voluntary Missionary Movement grow from 22 missionaries to 500, but after ten years God said to move on.

When a priest offered me a formation house in Illinois to start an American Voluntary Missionary Movement, I brought over two experienced leaders from England. And I lived in the property's forest as an ascetic, fasting, reading the Scriptures. Sounds romantic, but I could not pray. I didn't have an inkling of

grace. Four months later I was still stale and feeling silly and useless. Then in the ninth month, I felt a new awareness.

I could hear God's whisper: go and find the children. A call to work with prostitutes. My reaction was, what do I know?

So I hit the streets looking for hookers. The first prostitutes I met told me to blank off. When I persisted, they asked me, are you a cop, a journalist, a nun? I kept saying no, no, no. They saw me as harmless because I was dispossessed. Prostitutes know that feeling and so I was all right. Again, the people I had come to save reached out and saved me. They took me around, helped me out.

The stereotype that society sees is the tough, hostile hooker. This is what I experienced initially, too. When they knew I was all right, they took off their masks; and I discovered the children God had called me to find. Most prostitutes are incest victims, raped by Daddy or an uncle, a sex object from an early age. What that does to a child!

Nearly every woman who comes to us was raped at 6 or 9 and was on the streets by age 15. Now she's 35, been into drugs, beaten up, and she comes to Genesis House. After three months, she's doing well. She has a job. Then suddenly she's gone, back on the streets. The first time it happened I was very upset. Eventually the woman came back; we got her another job. Then she left again, and then a third time. I said that's it.

But two other women, ex-prostitutes, found her and said please give her another chance. Then the whole Scripture thing comes alive, forgiving 70 times 7. We have to keep journeying with the women. Why should they trust anybody?

Also, the reality is that often the job we help them find just doesn't pay well. They do better on the street. It was hard at first. Now I'm used to it. They keep coming back. We're there even when they blow it.

The job of Genesis House is to heal. We walk with each woman as

long as necessary, whether she's working the streets or not. No, I don't tell the women God loves them. Bumper stickers tell you Jesus loves you. I don't speak to them at the car-bumper level. My role is to show them, God wants to love you. We make coffee together, we laugh, do our laundry. We have parties.

The other night at our weekly support meeting we all had our arms around each other at the end. It was holy. How can I explain how I love them? As one of the women said, "I ain't never been loved before."