

# JOURNEY OF FAITH

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIMA RESCUE MISSION



*The story of what God will do in response to faith*

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## **Lima Rescue Mission**

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*“The Mission has been here for so many years; so many people have been through in different situations – different periods of our nation’s history and so many chapters in their own lives. We’re here to restore hope and rebuild lives.”*

*– Chuck Ferguson, Executive Director*

# Introduction

The Lima Rescue Mission was founded November 1, 1906, by Rev. Adam Welty. Since that time, the Mission has been reaching out to poor and homeless men by providing physical and spiritual care in a time of crisis. We strive to provide a safe and secure environment that promotes positive life changes and where healing takes place. The Mission also ministers to at-risk youth through a summer day camp at our campgrounds, Camp Roberts.

Our purpose is to glorify God by sharing His love with people in need through Christ-centered programs and services, and our vision is to see the lives of everyone we serve transformed, helping them to become independent and productive members of society by providing for their spiritual, physical and emotional needs. We are an evangelical, non-denominational organization.

The Mission is governed by a Board of Trustees made up of dedicated Christian leaders who are committed to furthering ministry to the homeless and less fortunate in our community. The board is responsible for policy setting, fiscal management, spiritual direction, and general oversight. Their dedicated service allows the Mission to carry on a Christian ministry that addresses important needs in the community.

The staff of the Mission combine to complete work which allows the ministry to run smoothly each day. They carry out many important duties, including greeting new guests and completing intake assessments, preparing and serving meals, providing individual guidance and Biblical counseling, and many supporting activities behind-the-scenes.

All funding comes directly from individuals, businesses, churches and other organizations who want to be involved in helping people in need in our community. We do not receive funding from any government or other agencies. Lima Rescue Mission is proud to be an accredited member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

With over 100 years of ministry, it is impossible to recognize every staff member or volunteer, or to share the story of every life that has been changed through the ministry of the Mission. So many caring people have served faithfully and supported the ministry, and many have turned to us in their time of need and received physical care and the opportunity to experience a new life in Christ. The purpose of this booklet is to share our history – the story of what God will do in response to faith.

“What are you going to do with that elephant, Welty?” Such a blunt question from a “sidewalk superintendent” surveying the progress of construction at the corner of Wayne and Central would have discouraged a man of lesser faith than Adam Welty. There were others who also questioned the wisdom of building a fire-proof, reinforced steel structure of three stories and a basement, thinking it too extravagant, especially in view of apparently limited resources. Criticism did not deter Rev. Welty. He knew God intended for this building to be a lighthouse to lead needy men to Jesus, the Light of the World. Also, this was not the first time he had embarked on a venture which seemed foolhardy to men of lesser faith, or no faith at all.

What was the background of this man of God? Adam Welty was born July 3, 1860, in a log cabin near Bluffton, Ohio. He was one of seventeen children of Frederick and Katharina Welty. His God-fearing parents sought to impart to their children the godly heritage which had characterized their background. Mrs. Welty’s days were so full that the only way she could give each child special attention was to combine those times with her seemingly endless chores. Little Adam was taught to pray while his mother milked cows, but the lesson was well learned – praying became as natural to him as breathing. The thoughtful boy grew to have a great desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ, but other things called as the years passed. After a term at teachers’ college in Ada and some time at Tri-State University in Angola, Indiana, he began teaching in a one-room school house in his home community. After fifteen years there, he was asked to teach at an orphanage in Berne, Indiana, where he worked for the next three years, receiving no regular salary – good preparation for the years ahead.

At one time Rev. Welty entered the grocery business, trying to evade the clear call he had felt all his life. Before long it became evident that the business world was not the place for him. In his words he tells of what happened next. “I determined to put the matter in the hands of God. One night before going to bed I knelt and prayed that a buyer be sent. Within a few days a man made me an offer for the store. I think that was the happiest day of my life up to that time. I felt free again when I turned over the key to him. I was now determined to answer the appeal of Christ which had been glowing in my soul for years.” During these years in the grocery business he had also attended Bethany Bible Institute in Bluffton to prepare for the ministry.

In 1899, with complete faith in God to supply every need for his grow-

ing family, Rev. Welty moved to Lima and started a Sunday School in a rented two-room building on the south side of the city. From this small beginning grew a church, the First Missionary Church, which still exists today. While attending a Missionary Church conference in Berne, Indiana in 1906, three people from the Lima area met under a tree for prayer concerning the need of a rescue mission in Lima. One of the three was Adam Welty, who joined in earnest prayer for someone to begin such a ministry, not realizing that the finger of God would point to him.

On November 1, 1906, Rev. Welty, again without any visible means of support, moved his family, now consisting of his wife, Miriam, and five children, to their new home at 207 East North Street. This large rented house would serve as a residence for the family and also a haven for



Lima Rescue Mission, 1906

transient men needing food and lodging. It was not until later that Rev. Welty learned that their new home was in the heart of what was then the “red light district” of the city. As he observed later, “The second night we were there two drunken men asked for beds. One of them said to me, ‘Mr. Welty, you sure are game to come in to this neighborhood.

As many as forty girls have been disgraced in this house in one night.” Trusting God to protect his family, he was determined to continue the work God had called him to do. These years were made even more difficult by the loss of his wife.

Caring for the home, family, and the Rescue Mission was more than Rev. Welty could handle alone, so two young ladies from the Bluffton community alternated in helping. In time one of them, Emma Klay, became the second Mrs. Adam Welty. Eventually three more children were added to the family.

During these early years of the Rescue Mission, men who accepted Christ and showed a determination to live for Him were housed in guest rooms, rather than in temporary quarters, doing odd jobs when calls came in to the Mission for help. This enabled them to pay for the meals Mrs. Welty served them, a source of income which would prove invaluable later.

Within a few years that East North Street house proved inadequate to care for the number of men coming for help. Although there were no funds in the mission treasury for expansion, Rev. Welty decided that

## Lima Rescue Mission's Directors



Adam Welty  
1906-1952



James Welty  
1952-1998



Chuck Ferguson  
1998-Present



Original auditorium at current facility



Meal being served, 1930's



Early children's ministry at Rescue Mission auditorium



Groundbreaking at Camp Roberts, 1974



Camp Roberts ministry, 1981

a larger building was necessary. He believed God would provide. A site at the corner of Central Avenue and Wayne Street was selected and secured with a down payment of \$200.00 which Mrs. Welty had managed to save. That was in May 1914. By November of the following year, the entire purchase price of \$5,000.00 had been paid by donations from businessmen of the city who had been visited by Rev. Welty.

From that time he moved forward with the project, never stopping to consider how the next step would be provided for. In March 1916, when excavation began, there was \$400.00 in the Mission treasury. After the basement was dug, \$4,000.00 was raised by a group of businessmen for the foundation and walls. By the fall of 1917, that much of the building was completed. Construction was suspended for a time during World War I, and resumed after the war was over. Original plans called for a two-story building, but during construction Rev. Welty desired to see a third floor added before the structure was completed. Enough funds were raised and a third story was constructed, leading to the building as we know it today.

Six years elapsed between the time the down payment on the property was made and the completion of the building, but more space was an immediate need. Also, on East Wayne Street another ministry called The Door of Hope, a home for unwed mothers, had been started. While this organization was entirely separate from the Rescue Mission, some of the same Christian members of the community were involved in both. When this newer organization was unable to continue operating, the Lima Rescue Mission took over the property as a temporary measure until the new building was ready for occupancy.

June 1920 was a momentous time – the Lima Rescue Mission moved in to its spacious new building. The fact that today the building still stands as a refuge for the poor and homeless is a testimony to the faith and vision of Adam Welty.

It is impossible to know how many lives have been impacted over the 100-plus years – sufficient to say that all who come are cared for, and also given the opportunity for a new life through faith in Jesus Christ. The number of men needing the facilities of the Rescue Mission varies with the times. A few years after occupying the present building came the



Adam and Emma Welty

Great Depression, with many men traveling from place to place, trying to find employment. This period ended with World War II, when most able-bodied men were either in military forces or working in defense plants. Following the war there was an increase in the number of men coming to the Mission needing food and shelter. For some it was the result of loss of a job; for others it was the growing dependence on alcohol; for still others it was the inability to readjust to civilian life.

With the increase in the work there was also an increased awareness on the part of the Rescue Mission Board of Trustees that Adam Welty, then in his eighties, needed an assistant. One board member approached James Welty, youngest of Rev. Welty's eight children, trying to convince him that it was his duty to step in and help. But James was born in the mission building and grew up seeing the hardships his parents faced, and he was not interested. He wanted to continue the teaching career for which he had prepared at Bluffton College. Adam Welty was not concerned about an assistant. He knew the Lord would provide in His time – and this was not God's time for James to take over.

It has been said that to be sure of God's call you need to have three aspects in agreement – a Biblical basis, circumstances, and the “still small voice.” There was no doubt that mission work was according to God's Word; the circumstances which made an unwilling son change his course began to unfold.

After two years of teaching, James had the opportunity to attend graduate school. He and his wife Ruthela and small son Michael moved to Bowling Green, intending to locate in some other city once the required courses were completed. By the following summer all the classroom work and thesis research were finished. All that remained was rewriting the research paper and that did not have to be done on campus. Interviews in different cities were promising but housing was scarce. Coming to Lima in early July to celebrate his father's 86th birthday, James called on the Superintendent of Schools for a visit only, since he had no intention of returning to the Lima school system. But God had other plans. The superintendent offered him a position at a better salary than had been promised elsewhere, and there was no problem about living quarters. God brought the young family back to Lima, back to teaching, back to the apartment in the mission building – close enough so that James could see the great need for help. This, along with his election to the Mission Board of Trustees, rounded out the circumstances of God's call.

There was still the need for the “still small voice,” and that came at

a service where two missionary ladies from Japan spoke of the work to which they were eagerly returning even though they were past retirement age and the country to which they were returning was suffering the aftermath of war. That day the decision was made. Adam Welty's prayers were answered – his son would be his assistant.



James Welty conducting a service

For three years this arrangement continued, and in 1952 the Board of Trustees chose James Welty to be Superintendent, while Adam became Superintendent Emeritus. In 1955, at the age of 94 years and 7 months, Adam Welty was called in to the presence of the Lord he had served so long and so faithfully.

Another key ministry of the Rescue Mission is outreach to children who attend Lima City Schools. In 1949, a small Child Evangelism class met in the Mission chapel. Over time, this grew to the point where some change obviously needed to be made. Those in attendance ranged from pre-schoolers who came with older brothers and sisters, to Junior High students. This did not make for the most effective teaching. In 1964, God provided the Children's Chapel across from Garfield school. It was now possible to have different age groups come on different days and the teaching could be geared to the particular age group in attendance. With the closing of Garfield school some adjustments had to be made, but the Bible classes continued with children being picked up in vans.



Mobile Chapel, 1972

Other neighborhoods also needed Bible classes for children, but purchasing more property was financially impossible. A mobile unit seemed to be a solution, but this was costly. Again God provided, as a bequest enabled the Mission to purchase a 1972 Travco motor home, which was fitted with small pews for children. This allowed five different areas to be reached each week with after-school Bible classes.

Both the Children's Chapel and Mobile Chapel operated according to

the public school schedule, but that left the summer weeks open. For a few years, Vacation Bible School was held at the Children's Chapel, but more was needed. The staff visualized a camp for these summer weeks but that seemed impossible. But our God is the God of the impossible, and again He provided, this time through a generous bequest from the Roberts sisters estate. In 1974, fifty-four acres was purchased and Camp Roberts became a reality. The first building constructed was the Edith Harris lodge, the result of another bequest. Over the years other features were added, such as a chapel, indoor recreation area, swimming pool, basketball court, and many trails through the woods.



Chuck Ferguson, 1980

In 1978, a young man named Chuck Ferguson began working at the Mission part-time as a janitor. Chuck knew the Welty family through his friendship with classmate Jimmy Welty, James Welty's youngest son. Through that friendship he also met one of the Welty's daughters, Colleen, and in 1980, they were married. As James grew older, Chuck continued to take on more responsibility, and in 1998, he answered the call to serve as Executive Director.

Soup ... soap ... salvation. These three words describe the ministry of the Lima Rescue Mission. At one time a large gift of onions enabled the Mission cook to serve onion soup frequently, resulting in Adam Welty being referred to by the men as "Onion John" – a name by which he became known from coast to coast among men who frequented rescue missions. Today soup is still served, but food offerings from individuals, churches, restaurants, and others make more complete meals possible. As to soap, after the evening service each man is given a towel, soap, and other personal care items. Clean clothes are available to anyone who needs them.

God's salvation is accessible to all who enter the Mission's doors. From the time a man enters he is confronted with the Word of God by a Bible verse at the top of the stairs. Before the evening meal, a short devotional service speaks of God's love, and in the evening service the Gospel is proclaimed.

At times a hungry man may refuse a meal, or a dirty man may refuse a shower. But these conditions are temporary. Even the man who eats heartily and scrubs thoroughly will have to repeat the process within the next day or two. What is truly difficult to understand is why a man,

burdened down with sin, will refuse God's offer of salvation. Forgiveness, cleansing, spiritual food and rest await all who will believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. This is the aim of the ministry of Lima Rescue Mission.

Since the work is primarily a spiritual ministry, it is operated without government subsidies. From the beginning in 1906 to the present, Lima Rescue Mission has operated entirely on faith in God to supply the needs through the gifts of interested friends. God has continued His blessing on the Rescue Mission. The ministry to poor and homeless men is carried on much as it always has been, providing food, shelter, and clothing, as well as a Gospel witness to all who come for assistance.

The history of the Mission is the story of what God will do in response to faith. Someone has aptly said, "It is not the greatness of my faith that moves mountains, but my faith in the greatness of God."

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Rebuilding Lives*