

INCORPORATING HIS FAITH INTO A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MODEL

“There is always redemption. My life is a story of redemption and God’s grace.”

Allan Irizarry-Graves, second year M.Div. student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, pursued a bachelor’s in criminal justice at Youngstown State University concentrating on corrections with a minor in social work. He had thought about becoming a lawyer. But the deeper he got into his studies, the more he sought to incorporate his faith with a restorative justice model. When most of his classmates were calling every person a criminal and that they should be killed, Allan was instead asking, how do we help these people?



When Allan looked at the young boys in the juvenile correction facilities, he didn’t see criminals. He saw himself. He saw boys that needed healing and help.

When Allan was four years old, he was removed from his biological mother’s custody because of her drug problems and was placed into foster care. During the next four years he remained in the foster care system, moving from house to house while never having a home. When he was eight, Allan was released to the care of Paul and Sandra Graves. Allan rode along with Paul to pick up two of his biological brothers from school. After gathering three young, hurt filled boys in the van, Paul drove them all to a house that would one day become their home. Two years later they were adopted. And two days after that, Allan was baptized.

He knew there was something special about accepting Christ, and wanted to spend his life in devotion to the unexplainable, redemptive love of God. This has led Allan to have big plans and big dreams.

“So what I want to do is create a Christian youth center as an alternative to juvenile correction, to keep young black boys out of jail and off the streets and give them an opportunity to live a life. We all make mistakes so why can’t we help these young boys and expose them to other opportunities so they can make other decisions.”

Allan hopes this center will be a wraparound service, providing access to services such as tutoring, counseling, and resume writing, in addition to simple things like clothes. Keeping them out of the system is important. Allan hopes this center will give them freedom from that cycle of oppression, just as he found freedom in Christ—to give them a chance for redemption.

“It’s not their fault they’re in the positions they are in. At the end of the day they are just kids. They cannot control that. We need to be the hands and feet of Jesus to them,” says Allan.

At this point he doesn’t know how this center is going to happen, but he is trusting God and God’s plans for him.

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