

By Jane Rubietta

At Christmas, thoughts turn to the inn that had no room. But three homeowners, who found room in their hearts for Him, have also found a way to make places of rest and renewal for those in need—not just at Christmas, but all year through.

A pregnant woman and her worried husband huddled outside the hotel door, cold, miserable, exhausted, and awaiting the imminent birth of their first child. The innkeeper slammed the door in their faces, and they found lodging instead in a stable behind the property.

To this day, the story of the man who had no room for the couple and their special baby—the Son of God—reminds us that by creating room for people in crisis, we create room for Christ.

Toward that end, some homeowners who have been blessed with a second home have chosen to use their property to create havens for those in need of temporary shelter or a respite from the demands of serving others through ministry work.

Room for Renewal

One such place is the Haven River Inn, overlooking the Guadalupe River in Texas Hill Country. In 1994, the inn



room

began as a vision of a small team of investors, including Drs. John and Suzanne Ramsay. The team originally wanted to renovate a turn-of-the-century house for a bed-and-breakfast business. After extensive remodeling, this old brown house outside of Comfort was reborn. The Haven River Inn opened as a 13-bedroom mansion hosting reunions, retreats, and weddings.

But God had even bigger plans. The Ramsays, who lead the Cornerstone Clinic in Fredericksburg, Texas, had noticed that many patients needed emotional and spiritual healing, at least as much as physical healing, but few people could afford Christian counseling or a retreat. In 1997, the Lamb's Tale, a nonprofit ministry, was born to develop a retreat and counseling ministry offering more complete-person care to the public. Partner counselors offered reduced rates to Lamb's Tale referrals.

The board made a curious observation: One-third of the counseling funding went to help Christian leaders. All the

while, national awareness grew of the exodus of pastors from the ministry. The alarming statistics and state of pastors' souls prompted the board to initiate leadership retreats and respite care. The Lamb's Tale board watched these servants relax into the loving environment, feast on delicious food, and find rest for their souls. Clearly, God had arranged for the Haven to bless Christian leaders—resulting in the donation of the property into the Lamb's Tale ministry in 2003.

Through charitable contributions and B&B revenue, the Haven and Lamb's Tale now provide pastors, their spouses, parachurch workers, and missionaries two free nights per year, where they enjoy sumptuous breakfasts, rocking on the porch, and swimming in a vintage, hand-dug pool.

Rev. Bill Buell says of his experience at the inn, "For my wife and me, work had been very hard. The moment Holly saw this place, she could not keep from smiling. With her very happy again, I was very happy. Lamb's Tale and Haven River Inn were crucial in reinvigorating our emotional

service



Thousands of pastors, missionaries, and full-time ministry workers have stepped onto the wide porch at Haven River Inn and been greeted by the sense of God's presence and all-embracing love—and plenty of room in the Inn to re-new their spirits.

Haven River Inn (below, top) is a 13-bedroom mansion once owned by lumber tycoon, Albert Steves. Built as his summer home, this 23-acre estate offers plenty of space for picnics or late-night stargazing. The parlor (bottom) invites you to relax and unwind.



health as spiritual leaders in the faith community. It is amazing what gets lost when we don't focus on the spiritual disciplines of simplicity, solitude, and serenity."

Thousands of full-time ministry workers like Bill and Holly have stepped onto the wide porch and been greeted by the sense of God's presence and all-embracing love—and plenty of room in the inn.

Room for Rest

Topping a hill in southern Wisconsin, a house nestles into the woods that lead down to a lake in the resort community of Fontana. Inside, peace permeates each room of the place that is known as Wellspring. It blesses the exhausted men and women who visit. Wellspring began with love, loss, and a legacy of care.

Miriam Kelm's husband, George, died tragically from a brain tumor. They were only a few years into their second marriage, deeply in love and deeply committed to God and to serving others. He'd received awards from their community, their church, and his business.

After his death, Miriam grieved, ached, and prayed.

One day, God revealed His plans for the next phase of her life: Miriam would honor George's life by buying a second home and converting it into a respite house for caregivers—specifically, people who care for abused women. Wellspring was born several years after George's death and continues to offer beauty and rest to an unending stream of workers exhausted from caring for hurting people.

"Folks told me the house would be trashed," says Miriam. "Quite the opposite is true. Often I find a new toy or book, a new utensil in the kitchen, or a decorative angel on a shelf."

Miriam opens Wellspring to three crisis-care agencies and also offers weekends at auctions to benefit the crisis agencies and other charities. She does all the scheduling, but the sign-up and waiver forms and keys to the house are kept at the offices of the organizations. Except for the charity auction recipients, guests either launder all linens and clean the house or pay for a cleaning service.

One man won a weekend at Wellspring for his mother. Because she lives in a trailer, his mother was unable to host large family gatherings, so she used her weekend to invite her entire family to come for dinner.

"She and her son spent all day buying groceries and cooking. The next day, all her kids and grandkids came for a great meal," says Miriam. When the son returned the key, he told her about the weekend and his mother's joy with tears in his eyes.

Another guest at Wellspring was a young woman who answers police calls to counsel with and advocate for victims of rape after they arrive at the hospital. "Is the house available for just two days this week?" she phoned to ask Miriam. "I have to get away. All I want to do is just lie on the floor and look out over the deck at the woods."

In that quiet home in the woods of Wisconsin, a world away from the crude stable, there is room for rest.

Room for Christ

On a winding road in rural Oklahoma, a brick house sat vacant for years before a parade of renters destroyed the interior. When the for-sale sign popped up, next-door neighbors Walter and Patt Thrun of Claremore bought it. Their sons lived there for a while, making as many repairs as possible. Though it felt like a money pit, Patt and Walt did not feel released to sell it, and held on.

One day while praying, "Lord, what do you want us to do with this property?" Patt felt guided to read a passage in Third John: "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers . . . you will do well to send them on their way

Snug in the woods of Wisconsin nestles Wellspring a cozy home complete with a broad deck, a playroom for children, a sumptuous master bedroom, and a fireplace ready to warm weary guests. The full-size kitchen stands at the ready to host group gatherings, reunions, and quality family time.



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That day, they decided to convert the property into Dove’s Landing—a home base for traveling ministers, missionaries, and ministry groups. Dedicated in 2006, the mission house provides rest for traveling evangelists, teachers ministering in the area, and missionaries. It offers temporary sanctuary for people needing emergency shelter, as well as a place for retreats for groups, churches, and special events. In the two years since its dedication, Dove’s Landing has provided safe haven and relaxation for more than a thousand guests.

The house, with its three bedrooms, sits on two and a half acres. Loving supporters from church donated much

of the gracious furniture, and Patt schedules all guests and cleans the house after they leave. She cooks for many of the groups as well. Her Sunday school class lends many hands to the deep-cleaning that is necessary a couple of times a year.

God finances this ministry in an incredible way: through a 50-acre commercial pecan orchard in the backyard. When Walt, who works the orchard, begins to worry about the income needed to support Dove’s Landing, he need look only as far as the trees to realize God’s calling always comes with God’s enabling. Remarkably, during weather calamities that have hit the area over the years—when other pecan orchards have flooded, lost trees in ice storms, and been infested with weevils—the orchards supporting Dove’s Landing have produced record crops.

As at the Haven River Inn and Wellspring, the guest-book at Dove’s Landing spills over with joy and gratitude. One entry is from a missionary couple from Canada who needed a place to stay while visiting her sick father; they returned only three weeks later for his funeral. “What a delight to be at Dove’s Landing again, especially during a time of grief recovery,” wrote Jimmy and Carlene Cobb. “The love and support of family and friends at such a time is of incalculable value.”

And Melissa Green, fresh from college and about to start her first job in Christian education, wrote, “Here in this quiet place, our Heavenly Father quieted my anxious soul. Here He gave me the words I need to hear before beginning service to Him.”

Patt, who is nearing 70, feels blessed by her late-in-life calling. “Sometimes I wonder why God waited until we were in our autumn years to give us such a wonderful ministry,”

The Wellspring living room, pictured below, as well as one bedroom, are each enhanced by a massive stone wall with a fireplace. Guests can curl up in front of the fire and just relax.



she says. "This would have been so much easier when I was a young woman. Nonetheless, 'to God be the glory, great things He has done.'"

Least of These

Though not everyone has a second home to offer for ministry, every time we open our hearts and homes to others, we open the door that the innkeeper slammed shut on the poor strangers in Bethlehem.

And when we do, we hear Jesus' words—a man who knew homelessness and knew hospitality: "I was a stranger, and you invited Me in . . . To the extent that you did it to . . . even the least of them, you did it to Me." (Matt. 25:35, 40)

For more information about each inn, contact: The Haven River Inn, www.havenriverinn.com, 888-995-7200; Patt Thrun, Dove's Landing, patt@apctec.com; Miriam Kelm, Wellspring, gmkelm@comcast.net

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The 50-acre pecan orchard at Doves Landing invites healing walks and solitude, and leads to a lovely setting overlooking a river. With a patio for entertaining, two living areas, and three bedrooms, space abounds for both privacy and community time.

