



RAILS & RUNGS Newsletter

MODELING CHRIST: GREG McDONALD

By Brian Beckman

Thank you for following The Ladder’s story and investing in our community. It has been an exciting journey, and we are so grateful for the way you have followed and participated in the journey. God is moving and working here daily. We give Him all the praise and glory.

On a late Friday afternoon in July, as I was about to leave for the weekend, I got a call from Greg McDonald’s sister, Gail. She was calling to let The Ladder family know that Greg had passed away during a nap that afternoon. Earlier in the year, Greg had resigned from his position as The Ladder’s Mental Health Coach to move to Oscoda, MI. This call was a hard pill to swallow because many had just talked with Greg that week. It was hard, too, because we had just lost our dear friend, Dave Richards, about a month earlier in the same way.

Soon after we opened almost eight years ago, Greg became a youth volunteer, mostly because he wanted to spend time with grandchildren who attended The Ladder. He volunteered with the youth a couple of days a week, playing pool, ping pong, foosball and other games. He was competitive; he didn’t like to lose, but he could play just for fun. He later became a mentor when we piloted our youth mentoring program, The Pursuit. Greg was all in!

About four years ago, Greg approached me and said, “I believe the Holy Spirit is leading me to begin a mental health ministry here at The Ladder.” He proposed to start two support groups: one for people with mental health issues and caregivers; the other group for those dealing with hurts, habits and hang-ups. After much prayer, The Ladder agreed to put him on staff and provide these support groups to the community.

Greg watched training videos on the Celebrate Recovery program, and he was proud of his National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) certification. In the beginning, he was leading support groups on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. He later added a third evening for people who suffer from bipolar disorder. This was a huge undertaking. He continued this until about six months ago.

It was through his involvement in the support groups, in staff meetings, and in Hero-Manhood God’s Way that we really got to know Greg. His heart and ways reflected The Ladder’s Philosophy of Ministry.

The Ladder’s Philosophy of Ministry

- We believe real Christian maturity is all about helping people pursue God. The Biblical word for this is discipleship. Jesus modeled relational discipleship.
- We believe relational discipleship takes place in the context of caring relationships.
- We believe relational discipleship is rooted in God’s truth.
- We believe that pursuing God, living to bring honor and glory to God, and helping others pursue God is a life-long endeavor.

Greg was a Christ-follower who [loved people by building caring relationships](#). He was the Good Samaritan to so many people—his family, friends and group members. Chris, who attends one of The Ladder’s groups, said, “If

you were a friend of Greg, you would be lucky, because he put his friends first—even in front of himself.” Greg spent time with his daughter, worked on house projects, assisted his aging parents, and helped others with all kinds of projects. Upon his passing, he was in the process of battling to get a person’s driver’s license back after it was revoked for an excessive period of time.

Rachel, a group member, met Greg during a time in her life when she had no one. “Greg cared about every single person he met, including me,” said Rachel. “God used Greg in my life every single week. He spent time praying for me, encouraging me and finding a way to help.”

Greg [coached Biblical truth](#). He shared the Bible with individuals and with the groups, too. Another person in Greg’s group, Jason, penned a letter of appreciation for Greg, writing, “Greg often invited me to breakfast or lunch, so we could talk. He would quote scripture and always encourage me to walk with the Lord. I am thankful that the Lord brought Greg into my life when he did, and I will always be grateful for the friendship and brotherhood I shared with Greg!”

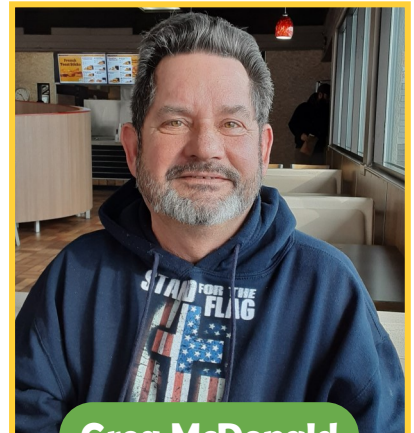
Most people cave when it comes to speaking truth to friends and family. Greg coached truth with the people he loved. He was willing to speak truth even when it was hard. He suffered because of it, but he was not willing to waive his beliefs even in difficult situations.

Greg [shared testimonies of what God did](#) in his life and in the lives of others. He was quick to share his humanity with others. Sharon, a group member, shared, “Greg spoke about his own struggles and had a very real understanding of mental health issues and how to get help.” God was and is moving in the recovery group, with people sharing their stories and testimonies.

In closing, Greg is now rejoicing with his Father in heaven, because he [loved God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength](#). But for those of us left behind, what do we do? How do we move on? How about we follow Greg’s lead, which is really Jesus’ lead?

1. Let us love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
2. Let us love people by building caring relationships.
3. Let us coach Biblical truth.
4. Let us share testimonies of what God has done, is doing and will do with the people around us.

Remember that pursuing God, living to bring honor and glory to God, and helping others pursue God are life-long endeavors. I pray for us all to grow in our abilities to help people pursue God. Jesus modeled relational discipleship. Let us model relational discipleship, too.



Greg McDonald

August 14, 1959 - July 7, 2023

YOUTH & FAMILY

Almost Heaven

By Troy Love

In 1971, John Denver had a hit album called “Almost Heaven.” He claimed it was in West Virginia; I say it’s in Shelby! I invite you to read Ephesians 2:6-7, Psalm 16:11 and Revelation 22:3. These passages give us a glimpse of what is happening in heaven.

Our summer youth program is called Summer Break Out. There is learning, pleasure and serving in heaven, all of which happen at Summer Break Out. From June through August, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were GROW days. We opened God’s Word and learned truth. Tuesdays were GROOVE days. We went horseback riding, high-rope climbing, bike riding and had many other fun adventures. Thursdays were GO days. We went into the community and served by pulling weeds, washing cars, sweeping walkways and baking cookies. In other words, we experienced some heaven on earth, and what a pleasure it was to see how it impacted our youth!



Happy trails for Ladder youth.

Our final GROOVE day was a tubing trip down the Stony Lake Channel to Lake Michigan. We experienced great joy, laughter and camaraderie as we slowly floated to Lake Michigan, trying to navigate around fallen trees in the river. When we finally reached the big lake, I was somewhat shocked to hear an eighth grade boy say, “Coach, I’ve never seen Lake Michigan.” Wow. His eyes were opened to an experience that was almost overwhelming for him. What a privilege to be able to provide him with that opportunity.

I had three students and two adults in my van traveling back to The Ladder. On a whim I said, “Okay, you guys, it’s trivia time! How is an inner tube like Jesus?”



Saphire courageously maneuvers the ropes course.

An eighth-grade boy yelled out, “It wraps around you!” Then a seventh-grade girl yelled, “It keeps you safe by not letting you sink!”

“Very good,” I said.

Then a sixth-grade girl said, “Hey Coach, give us another one.”

“Okay,” I said, “How is the river like the devil?”

“It tries to pull you down,” replied the young man. One of the girls said, “It’s like the devil because it pushes you into dangerous things like rocks and trees.”

“Give us another one,

Coach!” someone yelled.

“Okay,” I said. “How is Lake Michigan like heaven?”

The sixth-grade girl said, “It’s a great experience!” And the boy replied, “Because you never want to leave!”

Wow, that is so true. I was so blessed to hear from the mouths of our youth how their experiences at Summer Break Out were teaching them the things of God. While Summer Break Out is almost heaven, it’s also increasing their desire for the real, eternal heaven. Your prayers, donations and volunteering are making an eternal difference. Thank you!



Shining up the Sheriff. An eighth grade youth said, “This is the funnest thing I’ve done all summer!”



Tubing toward Lake Michigan—almost heaven!

The printing of this newsletter (July-August 2023) was made possible by an anonymous donor.

Psalm 115:1

Not to us, LORD, not to us but to Your name be the glory, because of Your love and faithfulness.

Our Mission

The Ladder helps people pursue God by building caring relationships and sharing God’s Truth. The coaches enthusiastically guide adults and youth to love God by following Jesus, living in step with the Holy Spirit, reading God’s Word, loving people, and making disciples.

Summer Fam Fest

By Mechele Martinez Gonzales

In July we hosted our Summer Fam Fest and Parent Appreciation Dinner. Our focus was for the youth to show appreciation and love towards their parents and families. It is important to us that parents and families know they are appreciated and loved by their children, as well as their Ladder family.



Dedicated mentors and Ladder youth connecting through friendly competition!

The youth who participated in the Summer Break Out program did a fantastic job of decorating the café prior to welcoming their special guests. Afterward, the youth moved into the kitchen to cook a spaghetti dinner: salad, spaghetti and garlic bread. They served their families dinner, ate with them, and even cleaned up afterward. These young men and ladies did an excellent job serving The Lord and their families!

It was great to see *David, one of our youth, smile brightly as his blended family (mom, dad, stepmom, grandma and siblings) came together and sat at the same table. At another table, two families sat together and were able to get to know one another. Four of our youth sat at tables with mentors. It was an amazing expression of love for all to witness how great it is when people come together and strive to make someone else happy.

While the youth washed dishes, cleaned up the kitchen and prepped for an ice cream dessert, Coach Love shared a devotion with the adults. He talked about a lesson he taught the youth just a couple of days prior. He asked the youth what a perfect parent looks like, referencing Matthew 5:48, and explained that none of us can meet this standard without Jesus. Only Jesus can make us perfect and give us the power to live perfectly.

The families also had the opportunity to play a game of cards. What a blessing to see friendly competition and time well spent between different generations. The families were also invited to pose for instant photos with a fun backdrop and photo props. Watching the families' smiles and silly faces as pictures were snapped and handed out was heartwarming and delightful.

At the end of the night, each family left with a basket filled with goodies: a

Ladder bag, a Ladder coffee mug, candy, popcorn, a deck of cards, card game instructions, and a note of appreciation. Our goal was to send them off with gifts that would encourage them to spend time together at home.



There's nothing like a dinner table to bring families together!

Fifty people attended the event. It was an evening full of fun, food, prayer, devotion, and love. We shout out a huge THANK YOU to God, our youth, their families, our volunteers, donors and mentors. We truly appreciate your time, commitment, support and love – a perfect recipe for success.



Ladder youth honoring their families by serving them. Happiness and love—these smiles say it all!

**This name has been changed to maintain privacy.*

Don't Miss These Upcoming Events at The Ladder!

FISH ON!

Sept. 30
9:30-12:30

FOR \$5 YOU WILL:

- ✓ EAT DONUTS!
- ✓ CAST, REEL, AND ALL THINGS FISHING!
- ✓ WIN PRIZES!
- ✓ EAT A MAN-SIZED RIB & CHICKEN LUNCH!
- ✓ TAKE HOME A SHIRT & A TON OF LOOT!






SCAN ME

Event is limited to 60 men.
Bring your son(s) 12 years or older at no extra cost!

SIGN UP NOW! Scan the QR code or visit <https://qrco.de/bdKcU8>



The Ladder's
HARVEST
festival

5k & 0.5k Fun Run

Sat, Oct. 7, 2023

0.5k Fun Run/Walk: 9am
5k Run/Walk: 10am

COST:
\$35 each, but if you sign up with 2 or more generations in your party, the cost drops to \$25 per participant.



SCAN ME

SIGN UP NOW! Scan the QR code or visit <https://theladdercommunitycenter.com/5k>

Our Vision

The Ladder is a friendly, intergenerational, and ethnically unified community center aimed at loving God and knowing and serving neighbors, so that individuals and families are transformed. Together we will make Jesus famous in our community.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Alex Crowder

By Vicki Davey

Alex Crowder is a young man on the move. Anyone who already knows Alex can clearly see that he is going places...and much of the time he's going on foot. That's because 14-year-old Alex is on the Shelby High School cross-country team. He runs for the team and for school pride, but Alex also runs for the pleasure he gets from the process. He uses his time while running to enjoy the sights and smells around him, the heat of the sun and the coolness of the breeze through the woods. His mind will dwell in the music that he loves as the miles pass beneath and behind. As he looks to the future, he can envision a career that allows him to make his living by incorporating running. Is this a pipe dream? With God, all things are possible.

Alex was adopted as a toddler by extended family, and he came to live in Shelby at that time. In addition to his parents, he shares the family home with a grown brother. He loves taking family trips and particularly loves the Manistee area, where many great memories have been made. When he takes off his track shoes, Alex enjoys reading. His favorite books are in the magical/fantasy genre and take place in other worlds where things are not as we find them here on Earth.

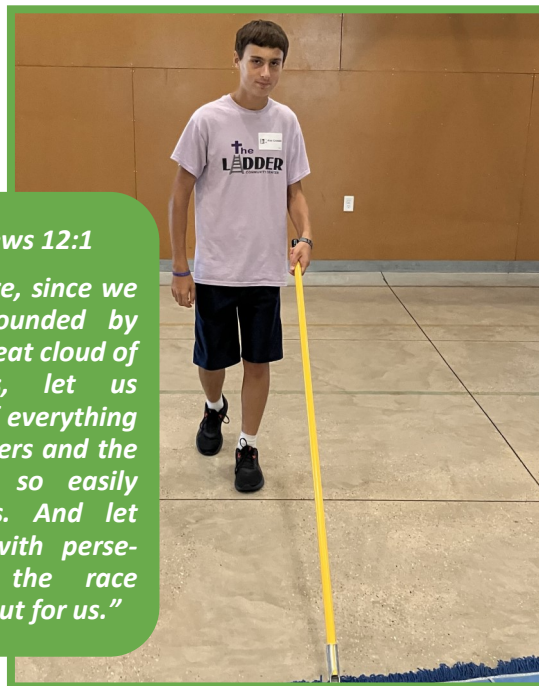
He enjoys his time spent at The Ladder with his friends and playing the many games offered here. He also wants to contribute, and will sweep the floors when the activities are done. He even helps maintain the pool table and cue sticks.

Like running, Alex also takes his faith seriously. He likes to pray in the mornings before starting his day. He believes this starts the day off on the right foot. He sincerely wants to please God, seeking the answers to various questions as they arise. Recently, he's begun attending The Ladder's Saturday night worship service, Celebrate.

Someday, when the long road of life is complete, I believe we will hear Alex saying, as did the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

Hebrews 12:1

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."



OUR FRIENDS

Tony Peyton

By Vicki Davey

There isn't a person amongst us who doesn't love the fellowship of someone who is easy-going and quick to laugh. I met such a person recently and was instantly charmed. A pleasant, good-looking fellow with distinguished salt and pepper hair, Tony welcomed me with an easy smile and a frequent chuckle as we spoke about his life.

Although Tony now lives in Shelby and shares a home with his dad Scott and his second mother Sheradee, he was actually born in Germany. When you're part of a military family, you get to move around a lot, and Tony has lived in various U.S. states and attended nine different schools overall. Hart, MI, was the location of the final school in this long list, and at last the great migration was finished. His brother and sisters all live in the local area, so the family has remained close together.

Tony doesn't drive, but that doesn't keep this active young man home. He has the assistance of several employees of a local support services organization to help him get where he wants to go. One of those places is Progressions Work Center in Hart, where Tony works three days a week. Here he helps with the sorting and processing of waste paper and has the important job of keeping the facility clean.

When the time comes to relax, Tony likes to play baseball on his PS4 playstation. He laughs easily about his batting average and his desire to make it to the play-offs. Baseball isn't the only sport that Tony enjoys. He says that he is a fan of the Detroit Lions and wore the baseball cap during our visit to prove it. Isn't it funny that a baseball cap promotes a football team?

On Tuesdays and Thursdays each week, Tony comes into The Ladder to play Bingo or to join in the chair exercise class. Sometimes he will try his skill at the air hockey table. He is always ready with a smile and a friendly exchange of ideas. Take a moment to get to know Tony, and you will add a smile to your day!



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or TLCC**