



RAILS & RUNGS Newsletter

GOD IS MOVING

By Brian Beckman

Happy New Year! We are grateful for each one of you and your commitment to follow The Ladder's story—the time you spend in prayer, the time you spend in service for God's kingdom at The Ladder, and the time working hard and sacrificing to be able to share the resources God has given you. You are blessed to be a blessing! And let me say, you have blessed us beyond what we could ask or imagine. Thank you for listening to the Holy Spirit.

God is moving at The Ladder! We have been praying about engaging and partnering with parents. In the early years of the youth program, we did not have the vision to focus on the family. After researching how to help kids deal with trauma, we felt compelled to help strengthen the family unit. Initially that was why we hired Beth Pranger to be the Youth and Family Coach. Now Mechele Martinez Gonzales fills the role. Connecting youth to their family is our #1 vital.

Isaiah 43:18-19 (RSV)

¹⁸Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

PROOF OF GOD WORKING IN THE *VILLEGAS FAMILY: GERALDO, SOPHIA, MANUAL, MARQUES, MARTA, MIO

OCTOBER 1, 2018

God brought sixth grader Marques Villegas to The Ladder five years ago. Basketball is his passion. Every time he visits The Ladder, he shoots hoops with his friends. He is now in 11th grade and attended his 120th visit.

NOVEMBER 18, 2021

Three years later, God brought Marta Villegas to The Ladder to socialize with her friends. She is now in the eighth grade and attended her 42nd visit this past month.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2023

Mio Villegas, a sixth grader, started coming to The Ladder this past fall and has attended 31 times. He told another sixth-grade friend that his favorite part of The Ladder is the Bible lesson. *That qualifies as a God sighting.*

The Ladder has prayed weekly for each one of these Villegas teenagers. Within the last year, we have been praying for their families, too.

NOVEMBER 13, 2023

In November, *Rodney, a local business owner, told me that the Villegas family had been without a well for at least two weeks. *God was on the move.* I told *Tom, a youth volunteer, about it. He contacted Dave, the director at Love INC, who assisted in getting the Villegas family a well. Love INC advanced the money with the help of the Community Foundation, and within a week, the family had water. *Only God could work this out.* The Villegas family was overcome with thankfulness.

DECEMBER 11, 2023

For well over two years, the Villegas family has been invited to quarterly family gatherings at The Ladder called Fam Fests. In December, *God answered our prayer* by sending them to their first Fam Fest. Geraldo and Sophia Villegas brought their three younger children, Marques, Marta and Mio. Upon leaving, Geraldo said he plans to attend HERO: Manhood God's Way. *God is guiding them.*

DECEMBER 19, 2023

The following Tuesday, Geraldo and Mio attended their first HERO Pit Stop, where they viewed the movie, "Show Me the Father." *God is working, always working.*

DECEMBER 20, 2023

A friend of The Ladder recently sent in \$600 to be used for gifts for Christmas for a couple of families. The next day, *Jerrienne, one of our youth volunteers, took Geraldo and Sophia shopping to buy gifts for the family. *The hands and feet of Jesus are working.*

JANUARY 3, 2024

Just last week, Mio accepted the offer to attend Winter Blast at Grace Adventure. He was excited, and so were his parents. *God is continuing to show His glory.*

From this Villegas Family timeline, you can see the hand of God stamped all over it. Yes, Jesus is doing amazing things at and through The Ladder. Thanks for your support of this kingdom work. It is a joy to walk this journey with you. God wants each one of us to be fully devoted followers of Him and to be fully engaged in kingdom work, and that includes you.

A PRAYER FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FOR 2024:

Numbers 6:24-26 (NLT)

²⁴May the LORD bless you and protect you. ²⁵May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. ²⁶May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.

*These names have been changed to maintain privacy.

YOUTH & FAMILY

Blessed to Be a Blessing

By Troy Love



Why have we, at The Ladder, had the opportunity to bless so many kids and their families?

Because YOU have blessed US!



A couple of months ago, I gave the youth a survey. One of the questions asked, "How often do you read the Bible?" A pair of twin brothers both wrote in the side margin, "I don't have a Bible, but I would like one." I shared that story with a small group of people at The Ladder, and a man donated \$30 to get the boys Bibles with their name imprinted on them. I was able to deliver the Bibles to the boys' father, so that he could give them to his sons for Christmas. A small \$30 blessing gave us the opportunity to bless a father and his sons.

Three months ago, a new church in our community asked us for three families they could bless with food and gifts during the holidays. Because we work closely with youth and their families here at The Ladder, we prayerfully provided this church with three families. In the past few weeks, two of the three families fell into unexpected and extremely overwhelming and difficult times. And yet the parents were able to be blessed with food and Christmas gifts for their children. I now realize that we didn't pick those families; God did. He knew they would need special help months before any of us did. He allowed us to be blessed so that we could be a blessing to these parents and their children.

A very generous donation was given to The Ladder in December, designated to provide for families of our youth at Christmas time. We chose three more families, who were so thankful for the needed support. We even had willing Ladder volunteers who drove them to the stores and shopped with them. Incredible! When all was said and done, these folks not only had Christmas gifts for their children, but a new friendship connection with The Ladder. I was so encouraged when the father of one of these shopping families brought his son to the next week's HERO Pit Stop. What a breakthrough.

Six families blessed! Families are vital to our community. When we rally around families in a way that makes parents heroes, our community improves. It's not always easy. It can be difficult and downright messy, but they are worth it. We've just celebrated a season where Jesus, our great Savior and King, was born in a downright messy manger and endured much difficulty because He thought **we** were worth it. Thank you, Jesus! And thank YOU for blessing The Ladder to be a blessing for the glory of God.

What's Happening in The Huddle?



Left: Ladder volunteer Don holds the ladder as Kimmie (top) and Landon decorate the Christmas tree.



Center: Weston plays a game of Giant Jenga. Enrique and Connor watch it tumble!



Below: Youth listen to Ken, a Korean War Vet, speak on Veteran's Day.

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.

Christmas Fam Fest

By Mechele Martinez Gonzales

Celebrating our youth, their families, and Jesus is what our Fam Fests are all about. The Christmas Fam Fest we hosted on December 11 was more special than usual because we celebrated the birth of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. Decorations were put up around the community center to honor Him. Jesus was born to save us from our sin by dying for us on the cross. Sharing the story of His birth and the good news of the Gospel with others is something God has called us to do.

Psalm 107:8

“Let them praise the LORD for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them.”

The evening began with prayer, followed by a delicious dinner of chicken and ribs (provided by Shelby Public Schools). One of the families welcomed a young lady to eat at their table, so that she would not be without a family setting. The youth at this table had a fun time together, even encouraging one another to smile for a photo. We later sang Happy Birthday to Jesus and enjoyed a delicious cherry & chocolate pudding cake.

The night was packed with activities. Our Youth and Men’s Coach, Troy, began with a devotion. Afterward, we all searched for small Christmas-themed items for a scavenger hunt game called “Camouflage.” We even gathered in the gym and sang praise and worship to the LORD — what a blessing for our youth, their families, volunteers, mentors, and staff to worship together. Paulette, a longtime volunteer at The Ladder, shared the story of Jesus’ birth with everyone. She used the big screen projector to show Bible verses and images as she explained the story. Paulette also incorporated a nativity set, so that our guests could engage as they listened. We also offered two crafts: a nativity scene and a manger, both made from popsicle sticks.

The Ladder staff, volunteers and mentors find joy in watching families come together to share a meal, spend quality time together, praise Jesus, and laugh with joy. We know the LORD also finds joy in all of this. Praise and glory to God for all the amazing things He is doing at The Ladder, in our youth and their families, and throughout our community.

If you would like to sponsor a future newsletter, please contact Anne at (231) 259-0211



We all enjoyed a delicious homemade birthday cake to celebrate the birth of Jesus.



Come, let us adore Him! All 28 youth and family members gathered in the gym, while volunteer Paulette presented the birth of Jesus using scripture and a nativity set.



Love is sometimes as simple as coming together to laugh! L-R: Brantley, Owen, Jade, Bekka, Journey.

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.

CELEBRATING LIFE

Leta "Pete" Mitteer

August 2, 1931—November 9, 2023

By Brian Beckman

Pete was the wife of a dear Ladder friend, Frank Mitteer, who came and played cribbage weekly with his daughter Becky and son Bruce. Frank passed in 2018, and Becky and Bruce still attend. I remember Pete as a dear neighbor growing up. My brothers and sister played with Becky, Bruce, and Marty, as our backyards were close in proximity. Sandy (Lee) Dean, a wonderful Ladder volunteer, is Pete's sister. Pete's grandson, Erik Smith, provides beautiful wreaths for The Ladder for Christmas. Thank you, Becky, Bruce, and Marty for naming The Ladder as one of the memorials. We are grateful for your love for Shelby. Our condolences go out to Pete's family and friends.



Laura A. Smith

December 26, 1940—November 12, 2023

By Brian Beckman

Laura grew up in Shelby. Many people may know of her, since Laura's mother, Udella Munson, was the secretary to the school superintendent in Shelby for many years. Upon her passing, Laura wanted her funeral luncheon to be held with her fellow members of the Shelby High Class of 1959. Classmate Mary Ann Mead, along with Laura's other classmates, all pitched in to provide the food for the meal planned at Mary Ann's house east of Shelby during the 2023 Memorial Day weekend. Since the group didn't choose to use the money allocated for the food, Laura's aunt gave the money to Mary Ann to do what she thought best. Mary Ann felt that The Ladder was the fitting place to give the money in memory of Laura. Thank you, Laura Smith, Laura's beloved Aunt Ariadne Winquist, and Mary Ann Mead. Our condolences go out to Laura's family and her classmates.



These obituaries can be found online:

Laura A. Smith: www.kepikfuneral.com/obituary/laura-smith

Leta "Pete" Mitteer: www.harrisfhome.com/obituary/LetaPete-Mitteer

Milton "Bud" Carl Olson, Jr.: www.beaconfh.com/obituary/milton-olson-jr

Milton "Bud" Carl Olson, Jr.

June 18, 1940—December 8, 2023

By Michelle Deuling

Bud passed away at home Thursday, December 8, 2023. He will be missed at The Ladder jam sessions on Fridays, where he often played the accordion. Bud's sweet smile and kind eyes revealed his joy as he played anything asked of him. A few months ago, I asked Bud about the progression of his cancer. He told me that the doctor couldn't understand why, but it had stopped growing. "It must be because you guys have been praying," he said. The following are thoughts from just a few of his friends here at The Ladder:



"Once Bud was your friend, you had a true lifetime friend. His music could be a one-man band, or he could join others and totally, joyfully play along. His quiet conversations will be missed by many. Rest in peace, our friend."

~Lee & Sandy Dean

"I've known Bud for a long time and his wife Louise. She was in my grade at Hart High. They were good friends, and Bud was a good music man. We will all miss him here and at other places. Goodbye, Bud."

~unknown

"We enjoyed listening to him play his music. I'm sure he will be missed by the other players."

~Carmen Osborne

"I'm going to miss Bud's smile. Even when he was not feeling well, he had a smile on his face. I loved talking to him. His family is in my thoughts and prayers."

~Ann Campagna

"Bud was in my class in high school, and we walked down the aisle together at graduation. I also remember him playing his accordion at the eighth grade graduation that my school had with three or four other schools."

~Donna Near

Memorial contributions for
Pete and Bud may be made to:

The Ladder Community Center
67 N. State Street
Shelby, MI 49455

You may also donate online:
www.theladdercommunitycenter.com/give



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