

Note: The reporter was incorrect in this area- we are not an overnight rescue mission, but a permanent residential halfway house. We don't care about their past, but we do ask extensive questions to determine their sincerity

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with Christ.

Religion

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A Non Profit Tax Exempt Christian Work

Son Light Ministries

Reaching out to their fellow man

By JUDITH RATLIFF
The Arizona Daily Star

Tony Delevin grew up roving the streets of Pittsburgh. At age 33, he is still in the streets. It's still where the action is, he says, but his motives are different and his outlook is brighter.

Delevin is Tucson's street minister. He established Son Light Ministries at 630 N. Fourth Ave. in 1977. He spends his days talking to people. He depends on "street witnessing" as an evangelical tool. He approaches likely candidates on the street and talks about his belief in the Christian life.

Son Light Ministries, until recently made up only of Delevin and his wife, Jerri, offers the drifters and runaways, the drunks and drug addicts who are still on the street when night falls a place to stay and a meal. Sometimes lodgers stay on awhile.

Delevin makes it a point not to ask too many of the unwanted questions. Where do you come from? Where are you going? What are you doing in the streets?

He is more interested in talking about potential than about the past. He says he is just planting seeds, he usually is not around for the harvest.

"I share Jesus Christ with people," Delevin said. "I tell them how Christ can help them get their lives together and what it means to be a Christian. Whether they accept it or not is not the question. At least they've heard it."

"These people drift in and most of them drift out. Maybe in the future they will remember the past. Maybe it will stay with them that somebody took them in and showed them love."

Street people turn off to too much professionalism pretty quick, according to Delevin, even when the professional is trying to help them.

"These people don't want somebody who seems to have it made coming on strong with them," Delevin said.

"They don't want somebody giving them too much advice. People on the outs usually think people who want to help them are big shots. They think the big shots see them as the scum of the earth. It's not easy to get by all of that."

Most of the people Delevin works with come from broken homes, he said. For this and for other reasons, they are "so far behind the eight ball" that they distrust everybody.

Primarily, Delevin said, these people distrust society. They are unwilling to accept society's view of them as outcasts who need help.

Son Light Ministries is meant to reach out to people in trouble who are unlikely to seek help for themselves, to offer the low-key help, such as food and shelter, they will be willing to accept and to share some ideas.

Delevin knows that street ministries make a difference in lives because a street ministry changed his life.

At 25, he says, he was a broken man. He had supported himself since he was a kid by singing. He was putting himself through Duquesne University divinity school when his first marriage broke up and he began taking more drugs than usual. More than he could handle, although he had grown up in an Italian ghetto and was familiar with drugs.

"I always thought I was a normal, rough, Italian street kid, a typical nut," Delevin said. "But, here I was, my life was falling apart. The things I did seemed like they made sense at the time and then nothing made sense."

"Around this time, I had the chance to talk to two Christian women and I knew they had something that was real. I'd read about Nicky Cruz, the ex-gangland leader who took Christianity to the streets. He used to beat people with garbage cans. I'd used a few baseball bats and I knew we could talk."

Delevin went to work for the Cruz organization, which has grown since



Jerri Delevin, Phil Thompson and JoAnn Maietta, from left in background, and Tony Delevin, foreground, in front of Son Light Ministries. (Star photo by Jose Galvez)

and is now headquartered in Denver. He later worked for street ministries in Texas and California. He calls coming to Tucson a "step of faith." He knew only one Tucsonan and had no precise idea about what he would do.

But, things fell together for Delevin. He would say the Lord had it planned from the beginning. On Feb. 12, 1978, ministers from Jesus Fellowship and Tucson Christian Fellowship, two local non-demoninational parishes, ordained Delevin. Son Light and these churches continue to have ties, but they find it difficult to offer much financial support. Delevin was recently made chaplain of the Pima County Jail.

"The Lord wants me here," Delevin maintains, although in a lot of ways his work is a constant struggle. He said that mainline churches shy away from supporting his work. He depends on what he calls the "supernatural support of God" to keep his doors open.

This support has meant anonymous

donations, a landlord who decided to donate equity in the house to Son Light and let the ministry assume the mortgage, and gifts of food and clothing. Delevin takes on odd jobs himself when the ministry needs money and his wife works days as a medical technician.

Two Christian counselors recently joined the Son Light staff. They and the Delevins talk with some uncertainty, but with hope about the future.

With additional financial support and a few more workers, they will be able to do a lot more such as stage concerts and street dramas as evangelical tools, they said.

They hope they can help bring the concept of community back to church going. They quote Acts II: 41-47. The verses present a picture of first-century Christians living close together with a real sense of neighborhood, breaking bread together each day, depending on each other for their needs, serving each other.