



# Voices from Home

Fall 2009

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## The AIDS Run & Walk: More Than Just a Fundraiser

Every year in September or October, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago holds an event called the AIDS Run & Walk Chicago. Since it began in 2001, this event has raised over \$2 million in the fight against HIV/AIDS and supported more than 150 HIV service providers in the Chicagoland area. Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry is one of these beneficiary organizations, but we also choose to participate each year by forming a team of runners and walkers comprised of residents, staff, volunteers, board members, committee members, and friends of Bonaventure House and The Harbor. The AIDS Run & Walk is an ideal fundraiser in that 100% of our team's registrations and sponsorships go directly to enacting our mission at little or no cost to our organization. Examined more closely, however, this event is about much more than raising funds.

Two former Bonaventure House residents, Kim and Michael, demonstrated the true spirit of the AIDS Run & Walk through their active participation in last year's event. Kim won the in-house competition for having the greatest number of sponsors, and she also raised close to \$500. She only solicited people in her life that were aware of her HIV positive status, such as her doctor, recovery sponsors, and family members, but she found that many were excited to give.



She was motivated by a number of factors, including winning first prize among the residents, proving to herself that she could walk 3.1 miles on race day, and having the chance to give something back to Bonaventure House. Kim said it was just a matter of setting her mind to the task, and then following through. In the end, she not only earned herself a gift card with which to furnish her new

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## From the CEO

There are lots of different kinds of partnerships – life partners, business partners, dance partners, “partners in crime”, etc.



The essence of a partnership of course, is the coming together of two or more parties for a common interest or goal.

ABAM is involved in many successful partnerships. The staff members partner with each other to provide holistic services to the residents. The staff also partners with the residents to help them craft and achieve their individual life goals. ABAM partners with other service provider agencies to connect residents with comprehensive care and supportive services.

One such relationship of particular significance is our partnership with the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC). AFC provides a myriad of support and resources to ABAM and all of its partner agencies who are committed

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# Helping Others to Help Oneself

Chris is a person who has persevered. After living in Key West for 15 years, he returned to Chicago to take care of his parents. While he was here, Hurricane Wilma washed away all of his belongings and a successful interior design business. After that he says it was hard to rebuild and recover.



In March of 2006, Chris was diagnosed with HIV and AIDS. He had seen what AIDS can do to people and it scared him. His drinking escalated. Two months later, he had a withdrawal seizure and went to the hospital. Chris realized that he had hit the bottom and things needed to change. His sister drove him to the rehabilitation facility and he spent six months there. During that time he lost his job and his apartment.

Then, Chris came to Bonaventure House. He values the resources now available to him and the sense of support from the staff and especially his case manager. He says that community living is good for him because he tends to isolate.

During his first year at Bonaventure House, he worked hard to develop a circle of friends so he would not be alone when he left here. He has also developed a stronger connection with his sister and her children and spends more time with his parents. For Chris, living at Bonaventure House has also reinforced the fact that AIDS is not a death sentence.

Now, he is able to reach out to his community as well. Chris has volunteered as a peer counselor with patients newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS at another non-profit. With another Bonaventure House resident, he also worked in Wisconsin at Camp Getaway, a week-long camp for families affected by HIV/AIDS. Chris is able to talk openly about AIDS and his addiction.

*"Bonaventure House has helped me grow emotionally and mentally."*

Today, Chris has gone back

to school and is studying to be a substance abuse counselor. He feels that he would be good at helping people. What made the critical difference for him was working with recovery counselors who had real problems with drugs and alcohol. "Bonaventure House has helped me grow emotionally and mentally. Before, I was dishonest with people and myself. I have a story behind my life that can help other people. Now I can be part of my sister's and nieces' life."

## CEO from page 1

to the cause of serving people living with HIV/AIDS. A shining example of this is their creation of the *Community Direct* program as part of the *AIDS Run and Walk Chicago*. The *Community Direct* program ensures that 100% of the money raised for the *Run & Walk* by partner teams like Team ABAM comes back to our organizations. AFC does not deduct any administrative or event operation money from the *Community Direct* partners -- none. AFC created this program to help their partner agencies raise unrestricted funds without having to spend a single dollar in fundraising costs. ABAM is thrilled and grateful to be a *Community Direct* partner with AFC.

We are also thrilled that you are our partner in our work to help homeless men and women living with HIV/AIDS transform their lives. We cannot do this work without you! Whether you volunteer at

Bonaventure House or The Harbor, attend one of our fundraising events, or send us a donation, we value your partnership with us.

We hope that each of you takes the opportunity to be our partner in the AIDS Run and Walk on October 3, 2009. You can sponsor a resident, staff member, or anyone else on Team ABAM by giving a donation on their behalf. You can also join us yourself and walk or run with Team ABAM! Everyone joining us on Team ABAM will get a spiffy Team ABAM t-shirt to show your pride as one of our partners!

Finally, I just want to thank you for all that you do for our residents. We look forward to a long, mutually beneficial partnership with you!

**Michelle Wetzel**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry**

## Upcoming Events

### Taste for Life hosted by Tim Klont

(Thursday, October 1, 2009 at Kafka Wine Company in Chicago)

### AIDS Run & Walk

(Saturday, October 3rd, 2009 at Grant Park in Chicago)

### World AIDS Day

(Tuesday, December 1, 2009 at First Congregational Church in Waukegan)

### Art for Life

(Thursday, March 25, 2010 at The University Club in Chicago)

Please see our web site for complete details. RSVP appreciated for all events.



## *Staff Profile: Changing Lives One Person at a Time*

Success stories at Bonaventure House are not limited to our residents. Many of the staff and volunteers at Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry also have their own stories of personal struggle and triumph. One such story is that of Lela Smith, the Senior Case Manager/Recovery Coordinator at Bonaventure House.

Before starting a career in social services, Lela struggled with drugs and alcohol for 10 years. While in her addiction, she was unable to raise her two young children, and her drug use eventually caused her to go to prison. She tried many times to stop using drugs without success, but Lela realized that she needed to change her life when she found out she was pregnant with her third child. She says that "It was time for me to step up and raise my child by myself." She made a commitment to stop using drugs for good and joined a

drug and alcohol addiction program.

While completing the program, Lela earned a GED and developed an interest in substance abuse counseling. She



went on to earn an Associate's Degree and found a job as a substance abuse outreach worker. Lela then joined the

Bonaventure House team. She says that it was important for her to work with people with HIV/AIDS because she had a friend who died from AIDS and knew that, had she not stopped using drugs, she could have easily ended up in the same position.

Lela has now been a part of the Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry family for almost 6 years. While working at Bonaventure House, she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Northeastern University, and her dedication to serving our residents earned her the title of Senior Case Manager/Recovery Coordinator. Lela celebrated her 20th clean and sober anniversary on March 13, 2009. She credits her success to God, her partner, and friends and family. She says what she enjoys most about working at Bonaventure House is that she can use her experience to help give the residents hope for a better future.

### *AIDS Run & Walk from page 1*

apartment – she also had a chance to contribute to the organization that had given to her freely when she needed it most.

Michael was another "MVP" of the 2008 AIDS Run & Walk. He raised around \$750, more than any other resident, primarily by sending emails and Facebook messages to his friends and coworkers.

Michael says the secret to his success was a little friendly badgering: he followed up in person and refused to take "no" for an answer. He, like Kim, participated because he saw it

as an easy way to give back to Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry, whose services he had benefitted from for almost two years. "It was the least I could do," he remarked. When asked what advice he would offer to future AIDS Run & Walk participants, Michael recommended appealing to potential sponsors on an emotional level, making it personal, and emphasizing what makes Alexian Brothers AIDS

Ministry different than other HIV service providers.

Several of the things Michael mentioned that set our organization

apart may also explain how someone who was recently homeless can evolve into the top fundraiser for a non-profit like ours. Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry, Michael said, goes beyond administering HIV tests and handing out medicine. They support people holistically, challenge them on a deeper level, and provide them with benefits that far outlast their two year stay. Kim and Michael are just two examples of how this mission changes lives. All in all, the reasons that compel a resident to give back are the same reasons that should compel others to give. The AIDS Run & Walk serves as a perfect setting for both residents and supporters of Bonaventure House and The Harbor to come together around a single belief: that men and women with HIV/AIDS have a right not just to survive, but to thrive: to be given the chance to give back.

*The reasons that compel a resident to give back are the same reasons that should compel others to give.*

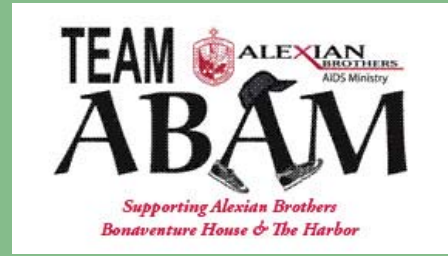
represent 55.6% of the city's HIV/AIDS cases. (AIDS Foundation of Chicago)

## Donation Drive Needs

Does your church, business, school, or team want to do something that will directly effect homeless men and women in YOUR community? Consider a donation drive to benefit Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House and The Harbor. Donation drives are easy to organize and we have already prepared a list of items.

- Utensils, including large utensils like tongs, spatulas, etc.
- Unbreakable, microwave-safe dishes
- Blankets/comforters for twin beds (new or gently used)
- Sets of bath linens: bath towel, hand towel & wash cloth (new or gently used)
- Hypo-allergenic pillows (new only)
- Sets of twin bed linens: sheets & pillow case (new or gently used)
- Coffee (ground or whole bean)
- USB flash drives
- Shampoo
- Men's and women's razors
- Shaving cream
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrushes
- Pads/tampons

Please contact the Development Team at 773-327-9921 for more info on putting together a donation drive. We are happy to answer any questions and to assist you making your donation drive a success.



## Join Team ABAM in the AIDS Run & Walk Chicago

Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry is once again participating in the AIDS Run & Walk in Chicago's Grant Park on October 3, 2009. We need supporters like you to join us by running, walking, forming a team, or making a donation to Team ABAM. Participating is easy. Simply go to

<http://afc.aidschicago.org/netcommunity/teamabam>

to register as part of Team ABAM or pledge your support. As a Community Direct Partner, our ministry will receive 100% of all registration fees, donations and pledges. That means EVERY dollar you raise will come back to Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry and help us in our vision to transform the lives of people with HIV/AIDS within a compassionate, supportive community by providing a home, comprehensive services, and spiritual care. Our goal this year is to have 100 team members and raise \$10,000, and we can't do it without your help! Contact the Development Department at 773.327.9921 ext. 138 or [dparish@abam.org](mailto:dparish@abam.org) if you have any questions or would like to participate.

10% of your parking will be donated to Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry when you use this coupon



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# Happenings at The Harbor

## A Song of Recovery

“Blues are the songs of despair,” declares Mahalia Jackson. “Gospel songs are the songs of hope. When you sing gospel you have the feeling there is a cure for what’s wrong, but when you are through with the blues, you’ve got nothing to rest on.” Sidney B., a gospel singer himself, would probably agree. Though always a singer, he has not always had a sense of hope to rest on. Thanks in large part to his time at The Harbor, Sidney can – and does – sing of a cure, and not despair.

Sidney grew up in an abusive family and was a victim of childhood rape. He was fortunate to be placed with supportive foster parents who introduced him to the church where he would learn to sing, but his biological family continued to be an influence. Much of Sidney’s life was a cycle of trying to take care of his family’s problems and then letting those problems, especially drug use, become his own. Though diagnosed with HIV in 1987, he did not really begin to break out of this cycle until 2006. It

was at that point that he had lost everything – including many of the people that he loved. After watching his sister die from AIDS, he stopped using drugs and entered the Salvation Army Recovery Program in Waukegan.

Sidney lived at the Salvation Army for six months before moving to The Harbor. Though leery at first of what to expect, he soon began to appreciate the peace and serenity

The Harbor offered him. There, no one was pushing him, and he could go at his own pace. One of the biggest lessons he learned during his time



there was one of humility. Instead of focusing on his own problems, he learned to turn outward and help others through their struggles. This in turn helped him to believe in himself, and it empowered him to share his gift of singing.

At The Harbor, Sidney also learned the importance of staying connected. “This place gave me my foundation [...] The Harbor taught me to stay connected no matter what. You are going to have some hard times, but it is how you go through it, [...] what you do while you are in the storm.” Though he no longer lives at The

Harbor, Sidney stays connected by working as Front Desk Staff and volunteering for special events. He has dreams of getting his GED, becoming a chef, and starting a Recovery Choir. He also wants to record a collection of hymns and is helping organize a community-wide celebration for World AIDS Day. He knows the healing power of speaking out: “If I can tell my story, I can give people hope.” And Sidney doesn’t just tell his story, he sings it.

*“This place gave me my foundation [...] The Harbor taught me to stay connected no matter what. You are going to have some hard times, but it is how you go through it, [...] what you do while you are in the storm.”*



**Thank you to all those who helped make  
The Harbor’s Annual Garden Party  
a wonderful success!**





## Check Out Our New Blog!

The online conversation is heating up, and Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry is joining the dialogue! We have added a blog to our website as a way to connect more personally and informally with our friends, followers, supporters, and critics, too. Check the site on a weekly basis (or add it to your RSS feed) for stories from a variety of perspectives including staff, residents, volunteers, board and committee members, and friends of Bonaventure House and The Harbor. Don't forget to leave us comments and feedback!

<http://www.bonaventurehouse.org/blog>

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BROTHERS  
AIDS Ministry

Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House  
825 W. Wellington Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60657  
773.327.9921  
773.327.9113 (fax)

Alexian Brothers The Harbor  
826 North Avenue  
Waukegan, IL 60085  
847.782.8015  
847.782.0822 (fax)

<http://www.abam.org>