

# Boulware Mission

C E L E B R A T I N G 9 5 Y E A R S O F S E R V I C E



Miss Milton Boulware

*"The Gospel Center Mission was founded on May 23rd, 1921 as a settlement house and a place where neighborhood children could be supervised and feel safe."*



## A M O N U M E N T O F L O V E

They say that anything that is not passed down for at least three generations will be lost forever. This year, Boulware Mission celebrates its 95th anniversary. Because many (okay, most) of us were not around during its early years, we want to pass down some of the Mission's history. It's not 100% complete by any means, but the Mission has meant so much to so many that we didn't want to miss this opportunity to share the highlights with you.

Today's Mission began as the dream of a 2nd grade teacher in the early 1920's. Miss Milton Boulware took Christ's command to feed the poor and shelter the homeless seriously and she devoted her entire life to helping others.

Early in her career, Miss Boulware's studies took her to Chicago, where she worked alongside social work founder Jane Addams at the famous Hull House. After returning to Owensboro and becoming a teacher, she saw the need for



The Gospel Center Mission

a similar program in the neighborhood where she taught. She wanted to provide a spiritual, moral, cultural and religious influence in the infamous Potter's Corner, around 7th and Hall Streets, which was noted for juvenile delinquency, drunkenness and murders.

"Miss Mitt", as she was lovingly called by her friends, collaborated with Florence

Pendleton, Prentice Farmer and Sarah Morrison, all teachers at Franklin School, and with Erma Bartlett, Miss Mitt's sister and attendance officer for the City Schools, and through the efforts of these five women, the Gospel Center Mission was founded on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921 as a settlement house and a place where neighborhood children could be supervised and feel safe.

The original Hall Street building was purchased and renovated at a cost of \$2,500, a small fortune at that time. \$1,500 came from the Christian Men's League and the rest through contributions from businesses and civic minded residents of Owensboro.

The Mission had been in operation less than a year when nine businessmen who had been supporting the project decided that it should



**Milton Boulware, left, and her sister, Erma Bartlett, in November 1948**

be incorporated and on April 11, 1922, the Gospel Center Mission was recognized as a non-profit corporation.

A young missionary came from Evansville to direct its work and soon the Mission was a very busy place. A day care center was opened in order to help women who didn't earn enough to hire sitters and the Mission cared for children at the rate of 10 cents per day. Mrs. Bartlett found that many of the district's truant children were missing school because they didn't have decent clothing and shoes. So, the Mission made an appeal for used clothing and a sewing class was formed, teaching women and girls how to alter donated clothing to fit new owners. In addition, the Mission was used as a place for children to play, sing, and learn Sunday school lessons.

During the Great Depression, in the 1930's, a soup kitchen was established at the Mission and as

many as 300 people were fed per day. Since the Mission was near the railroad tracks, many transients came off of the train and ate. By 1937, it had grown so much that a two-story addition was added to the building which included an apartment for the director and a large activity room.

Miss Mitt taught school by day and worked in the Mission by night. In the years that followed, she shouldered more and more of the Mission's load as the other founding members were unable to carry on. Miss Mitt worked hard at generating community support for the Mission, and when needed, she quietly paid debts out of her own pocket in order to keep programs afloat.

In 1950, after 50 years of teaching, she decided to retire and devote all of her time to the Mission. By then, the Gospel Center Mission had 32 rooms. It was housing transients, operating a kindergarten class for poor children (sponsored by the Pilot Club), and hosting prayer meetings and community programs (such as Girl Scouts). There were music lessons, a Homemakers class, Sunday school lessons and singing on Sunday afternoons.

Having begun in a segregated society, the Mission had originally been opened for white children; but, as the *Messenger-Inquirer* reported in an old article (date unknown), "the day came when black children came to the door and asked to be included in the

activities. Those who still remember that day recall that love defeated prejudice. Miss Mitt opened the door and the Gospel Center Mission quietly integrated."

In July of 1963, on Miss Mitt's 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday, the board voted to rename the Mission, the Milton Boulware Gospel Center Mission. Miss Mitt continued to dedicate herself to her life's calling until she died on September 23, 1970 at the age of 89, less than a year before her beloved mission turned 50 years old.

By the early 1970's, more than 1,000 people participated monthly in the activities provided at the Mission. Despite all of the good that it was doing, without Miss Mitt there to keep it going, hard times fell on the Boulware Center Mission and it came close to closing. The board entered into a 5 year contract to work together with the Salvation Army, but that arrangement didn't work out and they did not renew the contract. Then, in 1979, the mission partnered with Audubon Area Community Services for a while.

Several funded programs began at the Hall Street location including: after-



school child care, senior citizens' programs, congregate meals, adult education classes, transient sleeping facilities, cooking, crafts, quilting, feeding



programs for children, and more. Operational funding mostly came from the United Way while the Salvation Army funded the transient services.

The early 1980's brought residential managers to the Boulware Center Transient Lodge who helped between 30 and 40 transients, runaways and people down on their luck each month. Each transient was entitled to one night's lodging, a hot supper and a hot breakfast. In addition, the Mission's services included a dozen children sharing breakfast, lunch, and learning through the Head Start program and older children coming after school for help with homework, socializing, and a hot meal before they went home. The center met the needs of the neighborhood's elderly residents too, with a hot lunch and a place to play cards or visit.

It was a site for monthly commodity food distribution, meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, Women in Recovery, and Disabled Veterans. Boulware was also a satellite of the Longfellow Adult Education Center, helping adults improve their reading and math skills and providing career counseling.

In the early 1990's, the Mission became exclusively a homeless shelter and the word "Center" was dropped from the official name. Life skills classes were incorporated and the need for a drug and alcohol addiction treatment program was recognized. Substance abuse treatment services had been conducted at the local hospital, but when that was discontinued, the Mission went through the process with the State of Kentucky to become a licensed drug and alcohol treatment provider.

As the need for client services overextended the capability of the Hall Street facility (with a max occupancy of 38), the board considered the option of expanding that building. At about the same time, the availability of the vacant Passionist Nun Convent at 609 Wing Avenue became known. Given the potential for growth offered by this site, the board voted to purchase that facility rather than expand the Hall Street location.

In 2006, the mission gained approval from the city to operate the Wing Avenue property as a satellite of Hall Street with a maximum occupancy of 90 clients. A \$500,000 renovation of the Wing Avenue building was conducted and in November of 2008, the Wing Avenue campus was formally opened with beds for 31 male clients. In addition to male sleeping quarters, all addiction treatment services were conducted at Wing Avenue. Both campuses remained in operation until

late 2010 when the difficult decision was made, primarily due to operating costs, to consolidate everything to the Wing Avenue campus. The move was made in February of 2011 and the Hall Street building was rented and then sold to Lighthouse Recovery, Inc. in 2012.

Today, Boulware Mission carries on its founding tradition of serving our community's most-needy citizens. The Mission not only provides shelter services to displaced individuals, but also has a long-term life changing curriculum known as the "Self Sufficiency" program. Through education, treatment, and other services, this program addresses the root causes that led clients to the Mission in the first place. Case Managers work with each client to develop an individual plan of action, with the goal of becoming an independent, contributing member of our community; and client commitment to active participation is required to remain at the Mission.

Educational programs provided include such areas as: GED tutoring, parenting/family skills, nutrition/exercise benefits, budget preparation and use, Financial Literacy, obtaining

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A Home for New Beginnings

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and keeping a job, good decision making, spiritual awakening, and alcohol and drug addiction education and treatment programs.

Clients are encouraged to get a job, save their money and practice all aspects of what they have learned while living at the Mission. The ultimate objective is that each client will overcome their initial identified barriers and achieve, to the best of their ability, an independent and productive lifestyle.

This May, Boulware Mission celebrates 95 years of continuing Miss Mitt's work of service to this community! There is no telling how many lives have

been changed thanks to this visionary woman and her dream of helping others. Boulware Mission stands today as a monument to her love.

As we commemorate the last 95 years and look forward to the future, we want to extend a special thanks to all our supporters; without you, we wouldn't be able to carry on the mission of helping those in need.



Boulware Mission today



### SPECIAL NOTE:

If you are interested in making a lasting impact on Boulware's future, please consider a gift to our endowment fund or consider including the Mission in your estate planning. If you would like more information on either of these, we would love to hear from you!