

Church-sponsored car wash gives fresh hope to convicts and dropouts

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Three months after Thomas graduated from high school, his mother died of cancer and he went into a deep depression. Also 25, he said, he couldn't hold a job.

Thomas was a kitchen aide, a waiter, a newspaper carrier and worked briefly at a home improvement store.

"I quit before I finished the training," he said.

Thomas has been at Diplomat for two years.

"I believe that's the longest he's ever held a job, and he's an excellent worker. We have four training stations and I can put him in any one of those areas he knows it all," said Robert King, Diplomat's director.

Thomas recently took an exam to become a police officer.

"I can see it, one day I'm going to be an officer."

Pastors Cedric and Joyce Oliver of Embassies of Christ said statistics showing 37.8

percent of Indiana prison inmates are black, while blacks make up only 8.4 percent of the population, cause them to seek out those with troubled pasts.

It is that philosophy that caused Robert King to walk away from his career as a licensed investment broker. The military veteran joined forces with the Olivers and Embassies of Christ to help improve lives.

"I was drawn to this ministry because of what they do outside the church walls," he said.

At the church, King started out with humble beginnings. "I didn't mind cutting grass and cleaning toilets. The pastor saw my faithfulness, my staying power."

Now King manages the Diplomat Car Care Center.

"Cars is simply the vehicle used to bring the young men in," he explained.

Once on board for work, King says he prays that their lives will never be the same.

King starts the day with an 8:15 a.m. prayer call.

Employees are prohibited from wearing jewelry, head scarves or trendy sagging trousers. Crisp, clean uniforms are inspected and consist of maroon shirts, gray trousers and black boots.

Christian music sets the atmosphere.

An acronym that spells out professionalism reminds employees of the importance of work ethics like accountability, flexibility, reliability and selflessness.

Before the close of business at 5 p.m., King says employees on average wash about 200 cars.

Cedric Oliver said it is not a business, but a ministry. He said earnings from Diplomat are cycled back into expenses for equipment and employee payrolls.

King said the goal is to provide men with life skills.

The car care center has four permanent employees and six transitional workers who

are scheduled to complete the program in six to 12 months.

According to Sparks, who has worked at Diplomat since its inception, the center has moved six ex-convicts through the system in the last six years.

"For the most part we're just a group of men trying to get our lives together," he said. "We're not all ex-convicts."

But King said the church prison ministry members keep their eyes open for newly released inmates.

"It may look like no one

really cares about our young guys in our urban communi-

ty-but God does," Cedric Oliver said.

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But there is no separation between the church man and the admitted worldling. You go to church on Sunday and act the fool on Monday. An elderly man called to my attention just yesterday that in a certain business "they have no respect for women." I had to agree with him because what he was saying was true. And that man is a church leader. He has no respect for little children either, showing those pictures of naked people and little children exposed to them. God has left him alone. Friends, you can sit right under the truth and be left alone by God. You don't have to spend your money on prostitutes for God to leave you alone. If God leaves you alone you have just as much chance of being saved as the Devil and his angels! An unsaved religionist in my family told me recently; "it (hell) was prepared for the Devil and his angels." But you had better look and read the Word to see that the Devil and his angels are not the only ones who'll be there in hell! Over in the Book of Revelation there are listed 8 classes who'll inhabit the Lake of Fire for all eternity (Rev. 21:8). You can go on believing that only the Devil and his angels will be there but one minute after death you'll get the greatest shock of your life.

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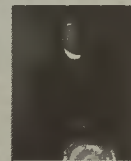
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