

Aaliyah's cry for help led her to PGM and a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

At Pacific Garden Mission, we rejoice in the countless lives transformed through the saving power of Jesus Christ. Every day, men and women come through our doors broken, burdened, and hopeless, but they leave renewed, restored, and redeemed by the Gospel. In 2025 alone, hundreds of guests made personal decisions to trust Christ as their Savior after hearing the message of hope faithfully preached in our chapel.

One of those remarkable testimonies is Aaliyah's. Her journey from trauma and despair to faith and freedom in Christ is a vivid reminder that no one is beyond the reach of God's love. Through the compassion of staff and the truth of God's Word, she found not only healing from her past

but a brand-new, exciting life in Jesus Christ.

AALIYAH

A Painful Childhood

"My name is Aaliyah Bankston. Growing up, my childhood was difficult. My parents separated when I was about eight years old, and my mom moved us away from my dad. During that time, I faced years of abuse at the hands of family friends that left me broken and afraid. When I tried to tell my mom what had happened, she didn't believe me. From that moment, I carried deep pain and shame that I didn't know how to handle.

"When we moved back to Chicago, I was depressed and suicidal. I felt invisible, bullied at school, ignored at home, and unsure of who to trust. I was

eventually kicked out of high school and sent to an alternative school, where I felt like a failure. Still, God placed caring teachers in my life there who showed me love and acceptance I had never known."

Searching for Hope

"As I got older, my life continued to spiral. I turned to smoking and food to cope with my pain, and my relationship with my mom was strained. One night, after another argument, she called the police on me. I was terrified and heartbroken.

"Later, after another painful, traumatizing experience, I remember walking the streets of Chicago crying out to God for help. I didn't know where to go or who to trust, but that prayer led me to Pacific Garden Mission.

"When I arrived at PGM, I was



“I truly understood that Jesus loved me, died for me, and could give me a new life.”

Aaliyah’s story is just one among many at Pacific Garden Mission, one more life transformed by the power of the Gospel.

Every day, guests at PGM hear the same message that changed Aaliyah’s life: that Jesus Christ still saves, heals, and delivers. Each week, growing numbers of men and women make the decision to follow Him; finding forgiveness and hope that no program or policy could ever provide.

Your prayers and support make this possible. Each meal served, each bed offered, and each message preached opens another door for someone to encounter the life-changing love of Christ. Because of you, lives like Aaliyah’s continue to be redeemed, and the light of the Gospel keeps shining in Chicago, one precious soul at a time.

welcomed with compassion and understanding. I was invited into the New Day program and didn’t realize at first how much it would change me. It was not just about recovery. It was about Jesus.”

A New Life in Christ

“That first Sunday, I went to church and heard the Gospel message. For the first time, I truly understood that Jesus loved me, died for me, and could give me a new life. That day, I gave my heart to Christ.

“Since then, my life has completely changed. I joined the New Life discipleship program

to strengthen my walk with God. Through Scripture study, prayer, and the support of my counselors, I have learned to forgive, to heal, and to trust God with my pain. He has given me peace I never thought possible.

“I now work in the Mothers and Children department, helping with meals and daily needs. I love being able to share my faith and talk about God with others. Watching the children play brings me joy and reminds me that there is always hope in Christ.

“God has also restored my relationship with my family. My mom, brother, and sister have all been saved, and my mom even travels from Indiana to attend church with me. We never used to talk about God, but now we pray and worship together. Only God could have done that.”



Aaliyah with the rest of her graduating New Day class in the PGM courtyard.



THE FULL STORY



To watch Aaliyah’s full video testimony on YouTube please scan this QR code with your phone’s camera.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. —Acts 4:12 KJV

SHARING THE GOSPEL ONE LIFE AT A TIME

When guests first meet Evangelist Phil Lacy, they are often greeted with a smile, a handshake, and genuine compassion. Phil has been part of the Pacific Garden Mission family since the late 1990s. After being saved at a local church, he began sharing the Gospel on Chicago's subways with Pastor Phil Kwiatkowski and other Bible program men.

Today, as a full-time evangelist, Phil continues that same calling within the Mission. He spends his days talking with guests during meals, offering prayer and encouragement, and organizing chapel services with local pastors and churches. To many who walk through our doors hungry, tired, and forgotten, Phil is often the first person to remind them that Jesus loves them and there is hope for a new beginning. His ministry reflects the heart of PGM, showing Christ's love in both word and deed.

In the last few years alone, Phil has personally led well over 1,500 people to a sincere confession of faith. Each precious name is kept in

his private journal and prayed over. At Pacific Garden Mission, this spirit of evangelism is shared by the entire staff. Every meal served, every prayer offered, and every conversation held is an opportunity to share the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. Our staff understand that the people who come to us are not just seeking food or shelter, but peace for their souls and a reminder that they are loved by God. Whether it is a chaplain preaching in the evening chapel, a counselor praying with a hurting guest, or a volunteer offering a kind word, every act of service is rooted in the desire to point others to Christ.



GIVE NOW pgm.org/donate



Please donate using your phone. Just scan this QR code with your phone's camera, and it will direct you to the PGM Donate page. *Thank you!*

GODLY STEWARDSHIP A NEW YEAR, A FAITHFUL GOD

Peter Leavitt

Assistant Treasurer,
PGM Board of Trustees

Each year, it takes more than \$13 million to operate our homeless shelter and the many ministries that support it. That number includes the costs of staff who lovingly serve, the food that nourishes our guests, the building and utilities that provide a safe refuge, the technology that keeps us connected, and the programs that point men, women, and children toward new life in Christ.

At first glance, \$13 million can seem overwhelming. But when we pause, we are reminded that this is not a burden we carry alone—it is the Lord Himself who provides. And how does He provide? Through the generosity and faithfulness of His people.

Every gift, large or small, is a testimony to God's sustaining hand. Behind every check written, every online donation made, and every prayer lifted up is a heart that has been moved by the Lord to join in His redemptive work of transformation. We are deeply

grateful to each donor who partners with us. Your generosity makes it possible not only to meet physical needs but also to share the hope of the Gospel with those who come through our doors.

The psalmist declares, **"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" —Psalm 24:1a.** Truly, all that we have belongs to Him. As we start 2026, we give thanks that He has chosen to use you—our friends and supporters—to supply precisely what is needed, year after year.

To God be the glory!

Visit our website at pgm.org to learn more about PGM's multiple ministries to the needy.



A Word from Philip Kwiatkowski
President, Pacific Garden Mission

NEW YEAR ENTHUSIASM

The prospect of entering a new year is exciting for many of our residents. A new year means a fresh start, and a fresh start means things can be different this time. Philippians 3:13 says, **“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.”**

For many of our residents, this new year brings a fresh start, and I want you to hear them in their own words, commenting on the New Year.

“For 2026, I would like to continue my walk with God here at Pacific Garden Mission in the New Life Program. I feel like this is my last shot to get myself together, so I need to do this the right way.”

Another writes, *“I want to be able to show my kids the goodness of God... to have the family I always wanted, and to finish the whole program and find or go back to my home church.”*

Another resident writes, *“To keep God’s Word in my life and not to let worldly things overtake my goals.”*

On behalf of all our residents at Pacific Garden Mission, I would like to express our gratitude for your love, prayers, and support over the past year. **By the grace of God, your support has kept our doors open and our lights shining bright for the multitudes of men, women, and children seeking refuge during a time of crisis in their lives.**

THE IMPACT WE MAKE TOGETHER: Your gifts at work

Pacific Garden Mission’s budget is completely donor-funded.

We receive no government funding. We are eternally grateful for the individuals, businesses, churches, and foundations that make it possible for PGM to serve thousands of homeless men, women, and children each year. When you support us financially, you’re not only giving to the Mission, but through the Mission to people who need your help the most.

In **November** your support made a true difference:



14,842 total nights of sleep were provided to our homeless guests



42 men and women enrolled in Bible study programs and provided room and board



495 average number of homeless people who received aid and Gospel services each day



15 mothers with **28** children were sheltered at PGM



3,500 clothing items were distributed to the needy at PGM



3,137 media outlets around the world broadcasted **UNSHACKLED!**



35,401 plates of food were served (est.)



126 people professed saving faith in Christ and became new believers at PGM

PGM TV

Discover real testimonies revealing Jesus Christ’s healing power and Gospel messages from Pastor Phil on PGM TV. These stories will bless and strengthen your faith.

TCT
Saturdays 9PM CT
tct.tv/tct-watch

tIn MEDIA
Saturdays 7:30PM CT/PT
tinmedia.com
Chicago/NL Xfinity ch.138
San Francisco ch.25

YouTube
Saturdays 7PM CT
Pacific Garden Mission Channel

NRB TV
Fridays 7PM CT
nrbtv.org/where-to-watch

VCY TV **52 WGGN** **RTN** **ZGTV**

Complete list of air times at pgm.org/pgm-tv

UNSHACKLED! RADIO & MORE

True stories of real people dramatized and recorded at the Mission every Saturday!

Check us out in-person or on our mobile app, YouTube channel (@UnshackledPGM) and website (unshackled.org)!

And keep up with our kids’ show, The Clu Crew, at clucrew.org!



PGMNews JANUARY 2026 • Vol. 91, No. 1
Published monthly by Pacific Garden Mission

1458 South Canal Street
Chicago, IL 60607-5201
P: (312) 492-9410 F: (312) 492-9414
Email: pgmnews@pgm.org
Websites: www.pgm.org www.unshackled.org

Philip Kwiatkowski, President
Daniel Woolman, Editor
Paul Higdon, Design

With your encouragement and support, we minister hope to the homeless, addicted, and brokenhearted.