



Gary Champ, United Ministries/Earl's Place

Today I Have An Identity: Earl's Place/United Ministries Inc.

"I didn't know what to do," says Gary Champ. "I didn't know what to do, so I sat still and prayed."

Champ, relief resident manager at United Ministries/Earl's Place in Baltimore, has been clean for five years. But it's the story of his 25 years of addiction that prompts his reflections about God, his vocation and living a spiritual life.

When asked, "What brought you to Earl's Place?" his answer is rapid-fire: "My behavior." Champ, who was a client of the CHHSM-member ministry before he joined the staff, goes on to explain that he lost his left leg in a train accident when he was seven years old. "My pain is like my shadow--it's always there," he says. His pain, both the physical pain of using a prosthesis and the emotional pain of being taunted and ostracized by his peers, led Champ to seek relief in illegal drugs. "The drugs took the pain away," he recalls, "and I ran like that for 25 years. And then the drugs stopped working and I didn't know what to do."

That's when he started to pray--and when he found Earl's Place. Champ cites his arrival at the ministry's program as the turning point in his life. "I am indebted to Sheila [Helgerson, Earl's Place's executive director] and this program because no one ever reached out to me before," he says. "Sheila saw potential in me. She is willing to help everybody."

Shortly after entering recovery, Champ is studying to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He credits his faith with providing him the fortitude to continue recovery, but credits Earl's Place with supporting him in his journey of faith and his efforts to establish a stable life. Today, Champ is a 3.0 student in a scholarship program at Dundalk Community College and works at Earl's Place on the weekends and holidays. "The program works," he says. "I am a living example. In order to keep this, I have to come down here and talk to these men because in order to keep this, I must give it away. You can't just sit around and talk about this. We practice it and that's how it comes out. "Today I have an identity. I am Gary Steven Champ."

CHHSM member, United Ministries, has provided housing and supportive services through Earl's Place to homeless men in Baltimore for nearly 10 years.

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