

A Purpose Forward Core Investment

Cherry Street Ministries – Restoring Dignity, Rebuilding Lives

When most people think of a city mission, they picture a shelter — a roof, a bed, a meal, and a place to stay for the night. Cherry Street Mission in Toledo, Ohio, goes far beyond that. Founded in 1947 by Jessie and Bertha Fleck, the ministry's purpose is not simply to provide temporary relief from homelessness, but to create a pathway from crisis to contribution — helping individuals move from survival to stability and ultimately to becoming productive members of society.

Deeply rooted in the Toledo community, Cherry Street operates on a philosophy of transformation through dignity. Every person who walks through its doors is seen not as a problem to be managed, but as worthy of receiving access to solution. While the ministry provides the essentials — housing, meals, and safety — its focus is on long-term life restoration, including job readiness, addiction recovery, faith-based mentoring, and life-skills development.

Unlike many larger urban missions that focus primarily on shelter capacity and meal service, Cherry Street's approach is comprehensive and accountable, addressing homelessness as a human issue that requires structure, discipline, and compassion. Its inclusive programs — offered through both staff and partner organizations — provide education, tutoring, and vocational training, job placement, mental health and addiction treatment, legal support, housing assistance, and Christian fellowship.

The Cherry Street model aligns closely with the Purpose Forward Foundation's mission. We seek to support organizations large enough to make a measurable impact, yet small enough that we can influence outcomes and ensure our contributions — financial and strategic — are significant to the overall program. Cherry Street represents that ideal balance: a mission where every dollar and every idea have purpose.

Since 2020, the Purpose Forward Foundation, through its affiliated donor-advised fund (DAF), has contributed nearly \$340,000 to Cherry Street. This partnership extends beyond traditional philanthropy. I work directly with the ministry's leadership, who welcome constructive dialogue and collaboration. Together, we share the belief that restoring human dignity is one of the most powerful and lasting gifts we can offer.

Still, the challenges remain significant. During this five-year period, Cherry Street experienced major cost inflation, donor grant reductions and the loss of a major corporate donor, creating budget constraints that limited progress — just as regional homelessness continued to rise faster than available services (Homelessness roughly doubled in 5 years).

That reality meant that Purpose Forward's contributions to Cherry street primarily supported operations, resulting in limited measurable improvement in outcome metrics.

The mission — helping people transition from the streets into society — makes perfect sense, but implementation is extraordinarily difficult. Success rates measured by individual advancement remain low due to addiction, mental illness, lack of education, and the absence of family or community support. Many participants have been written off by society and face an uphill climb toward stability. Their needs span the full spectrum: from daily survival to full societal integration, where they can hold jobs, pay rent, and contribute to society.

Purpose Forward's next phase will focus on improving program graduation from Cherry Street programs — achieving measurable integration and sustainable independence. Our goal is a 20% annual improvement in success rates through enhanced data use, stronger accountability, and performance-based management.

With Cherry Street's operating budgets now stabilized and growing, Purpose Forward will continue its commitment by allocating 25% of annual donor contributions to the ministry.

Each year, we will measure three core metrics:

- a) total participants served,
- b) graduation count and rate (%), and
- c) year-over-year comparisons.

Over time, this data will help establish benchmarking standards and uncover the correlation between dollars invested and improved outcomes, shaping future fundraising and program goals.

Purpose Forward brings the horsepower, access, and experience to drive that change — a transformation powered by metrics, not politics. Our partnership with Cherry Street demonstrates what's possible when private initiative, faith-based compassion, and disciplined management unite for a common cause: restoring human dignity, one life at a time.

Click on

<https://cherrystreetmission.org/about/>

to learn more about all the ways that Cherry Street is leading the cause in addressing homelessness.