



November 6, 2024

Bishop Ira Combs  
Founder & Executive Director  
Christ Centered Homes  
327 W Monroe Street  
Jackson, MI 49202

Dear Bishop,

As you celebrate your remarkable career, I wanted to take a moment to personally reflect on the profound impact you have had on our community, particularly through your unwavering dedication to mental health services at Christ Centered Homes.

You have been much more than a leader; you have been a beacon of hope for countless individuals and families facing mental health challenges. Your commitment to providing compassionate care has not only transformed lives but has fostered a sense of belonging for those who have often felt marginalized. Through your tireless advocacy, you have broken through barriers and stigma, raising awareness about mental health issues and the importance of addressing them with empathy and dignity.

We have witnessed the incredible ways in which you and Christ Centered Homes have consistently stepped up to support the community. No matter the situation, you were always willing to help Lifeways and other network providers when there was a consumer in need — whether it was lending a van to Community Norm for a period of time or making sure that individuals had the support they needed even in the most challenging cases. You would never hesitate to go the extra mile, rarely issuing emergency discharges, always prioritizing the well-being of the individual, even if it meant absorbing financial costs to ensure they had a place to stay, or repairs needed to be made. You've made it clear time and time again: it was never just about the bottom line; it was about the people you served.

In your leadership at Christ Centered Homes, you also empowered consumers by providing opportunities for employment, whether in custodial work at the corporate office or maintenance of the homes. It was this belief in people, even when they struggled to believe in themselves, that formed the core of your ministry and your work in mental health care.

Your charisma and approachability, Bishop, are unforgettable. You always had a smile on your face, and your leadership style fostered a culture of care, compassion, and dedication within your staff. Your employees followed your example of excellence in the care provided to those receiving services. You knew every consumer's name and

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made them feel welcome, often doing unannounced monitoring visits to make sure that everyone was receiving the attention and respect they deserved.

It is going to be hard to think of our residential services without thinking of you and the many years of commitment and passion you've devoted to this work. You always kept the people we serve at the heart of every decision you made, and that will be your enduring legacy. Your leadership has been a guiding light in the mental health community, and your contributions have been immeasurable.

Your belief in the people of Jackson and in the power of faith led you to expand your ministry and to provide mental health services to those suffering from mental illness in local facilities, using Christian principles as your guiding light.

Although this community had never seen anyone quite like you, you were undeterred. You purchased a piece of property on Monroe Street that would become the beautiful church we know today, and you submitted the necessary documentation to open your first mental health facility under the name Christ Centered Homes. The approval process for that first home wasn't easy. You had to study the public mental health system, lobby the State of Michigan, the County Board of Commissioners, and the LifeWays Board of Directors. You did this through determination, building bridges, and working tirelessly with administrators, elected officials, and families of the mentally ill.

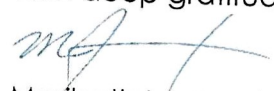
Today, Christ Centered Homes stands as a testament to your vision, one that consistently asks, "What's best for the people we serve?" You have taught us all the importance of advocacy and service to the most vulnerable members of our community. We thank you for always listening when we needed help, for your willingness to hear our concerns, and for your tireless advocacy for mental health policies and legislation that have supported LifeWays and the broader mental health community over the years.

For over 35 years, you have been a leader in faith-based care for the mentally ill. Your commitment to this work has secured your enduring legacy and left a memorable impact on all of us who have been privileged to work alongside you.

As you embark on the next chapter of your life, we all join you in saying, "Onward and Upward!"

Bishop Combs, thank you for everything. You have truly made a difference in so many lives, and we will continue to carry the lessons you've taught us.

With deep gratitude and admiration,



Maribeth Leonard, MBA, LBSW  
Chief Executive Officer