

Ministry Reaches Growing Homeless Population in New York City

New York City Relief offers soup, hot chocolate, clothing, counseling—and the gospel—to street dwellers

The homeless population in New York City exploded last winter to an all-time high of 38,000, official estimates report. Shelter capacities were taxed to the maximum, and many shelter residents were forced to fend for themselves during the day, searching for handouts.

That's when New York City Relief (NYCR), a nonprofit ministry, stepped in to deliver food, resources and the gospel to the needy and homeless. "We're seeing increased need on the street all around," said Dan Stoltzfus, NYCR director of development. "There's a growing affordable housing crisis in New York and an unemployment rate above 8 percent, much higher than the national average."

Stoltzfus said unofficial sources have told him the true homeless tally is closer to 100,000.

During the winter, two NYCR school buses served hot soup, hot chocolate and food on eight weekly stops in Manhattan, Harlem, Brooklyn and the Bronx. The food deliveries continued as the temperature grew warmer.

Kenny, a shelter resident, visited the Harlem bus every Friday. "I get bread and hot chocolate and soup," he told Charisma in January. Robert, who suffers from AIDS, is another regular. "They [NYCR] help me with counseling," he said. "They

have given me food and clothing.”

Brenda relies on NYCR for encouragement. “Prayer means so much sometimes,” she said. “They uplifted my day.” A dialysis patient, she cannot work and collects a disabilities pension. She moans about social agency cutbacks and the treatment of seniors. “They put you in a corner like an old shoe,” she said.

Dave Anderson, director of bus outreach, relates easily to street people because he was one of them. “I kind of put myself right there with them,” he told Charisma. “I share the hope and trust that God has given me.”

He recalls an incident with Daisy, a methadone addict for 10 years. “I’m just tired of the way I’m living,” she told him. “I want to kill myself.” After sharing 2 Corinthians 5:17 with her, Anderson led her to Jesus, and she entered a drug-treatment program the following Saturday. Daisy has been clean for four months and attends a neighborhood church. “What a wonderful God we serve,” she said. “God is good.”

Since 1990 NYCR has given out 1.5 million servings of food and beverages, and made 41,508 referrals connecting needy people to substance-abuse treatment programs, shelters, food pantries, clothing, healthcare and jobs. “We’re obviously here to meet people’s physical needs,” Stoltzfus said. “But we need to be able to take them to the source of all hope, which is Jesus Christ.”

Richard and Dixie Galloway founded the ministry in 1989. At one time the couple managed multiple businesses and owned a 22-room mansion, a cattle ranch, boats, airplanes, a Rolls

Royce, two Porsches and a Jaguar. Richard worked like a fiend but also played hard soaking up drugs and booze. Their marriage was collapsing. "I only knew how to make money and get loaded," he said.

After miraculous life-changing encounters with Christ in 1981, they sold everything and devoured the Bible together. They planted a church and did evangelism in the Caribbean and Texas. Almost broke in 1988, they worked with Christ for the Nations in Long Island, N.Y., for a while and took an old school bus into Manhattan to feed street people.

Since then NYCR () has grown to 14 full-time staffers and many volunteers who work out of a former factory in Elizabeth, N.J. They operate a food pantry, crisis and counseling programs, and substance-abuse support groups. Individuals and churches support the annual budget of \$500,000.

The Galloways have refused funds from groups that restrict evangelism or want them to distribute condoms and information about abortion. NYCR is adding a new bus, and in September it will launch the East Coast School of Urban Ministries, a one-year training program in inner-city missions. "We're agents of this supernatural thing called caring," Richard Galloway said.

NYCR continues pushing the faith envelope every day. "Our product is hope," Dixie Galloway said. "Without the Holy Spirit nothing real or significant happens. The Holy Spirit has to change lives. We're just agents."

Peter K. Johnson in