

Minnesota Couple Turn Corporate Surplus Into Tool for Ministry

Through their Hope for the City ministry, Dennis and Megan Doyle will dole out millions of dollars in excess goods this year

A charity that will this year distribute some \$300 million in aid worldwide started just a few years ago with a simple realization: "We have lots of warehouse space."

Coming from Dennis Doyle, that's a bit of an understatement. As CEO of Welsh Companies, this Christian businessman oversees Minnesota's largest full-service real estate company: a \$125 million privately owned corporation that manages 22 million square feet of real estate valued at \$1.5 billion.

Some of that is empty warehouse space. Putting that together with an extensive network of clients in both business and ministry led Dennis and his wife,

Megan, to found Hope for the City, which acts as a "middle man," taking corporate surplus and getting it into the hands of organizations that fight poverty.

Hope for the City really began when the Doyles began meeting regularly with other couples for prayer. "We ... believed that we heard God say that He wanted to start a ministry to reach businesspeople, to awaken them in their careers to be open to the fact that God can use them right where they are," Megan Doyle said.

That got the Doyles thinking. They realized that in addition to warehouse space, they had contacts with a lot of corporate leaders, for most large Minnesota companies wind up doing business with Welsh Companies at some point.

“We realized we knew who the inner-city workers were because we supported them with both time and money,” Megan Doyle said. “We also realized that ... there’s a lot of excess resources out there—food, clothing, medical equipment, office supplies, excess or just slightly used furniture that gets thrown away—that could easily be ... distributed to these inner-city ministries to help them be more effective in serving their clients.”

The Doyles use their contacts in the business world to find organizations with high-quality surplus goods. They find organizations working to lift people out of poverty through contacts in ministry, including their church—Grace Church in Eden Prairie, Minn. And they use whatever warehouse space isn’t leased at the moment to store surplus goods that are being transferred from those who have them to those who need them.

An early partner in Hope for the City was Internet-based grocery delivery company that donates surplus food. Others soon followed, including the Gap, Old Navy, Wal-Mart, Office Depot, Bed Bath & Beyond and Avon. Donations from pharmaceutical and medical supply companies, distributed worldwide, soon pushed total retail volume of donated goods to record highs: from \$8.6 million in 2001 to \$120 million in 2002 to some \$300 million and counting this year.

Hope for the City picks up donated goods when necessary and uses Welsh Companies warehouses as distribution sites. Most of

the groups benefiting from Hope for the City are Christian ministries, but other faiths and secular organizations are served as well, a fact that opens doors to major corporations. All of this is done with remarkably low overhead: less than 1 percent of their \$120 million budget in 2002.

Though the goods are donated without charge, the philosophy behind Hope for the City is not to provide handouts. "We believe that you're not going to change a city or change people unless you actually work on the core issues behind the problems," Dennis Doyle said.

With that in mind, Hope for the City partners with organizations "who are touching the people and actually making a change in their lives," he noted. "There are more than enough quality people doing the job. We aren't going to compete with the people who are there." In a biblical reference to the men who held up Moses' hands during Israel's battle with the Amalekites, he added, "We're going to lift up their arms."

The support role has paid an unexpected dividend. Quarterly meetings of organizational leaders who benefit from Hope for the City have helped smaller inner-city ministries network with one another. "Even though there's a ton of nonprofits and a ton of people ministering, a lot of them don't know who's on the next block," Megan Doyle said.

The Doyles hope the success of Hope for the City encourages others to look for creative ways to use the resources God has given them. "You can make your business into your ministry," Dennis Doyle said. "Look at what God put into your hand. Lift it up to the Lord."

Doug Trouten