

The Changing Poor

✖ Jeff Nene has been seeing a lot of familiar faces at Convoy of Hope events this year—and that concerns him. People who volunteered last year are now standing in line to receive the groceries and other goods the Assemblies of God ministry distributes annually in 50 cities nationwide.

“We see the face of the poor changing,” says Nene, Convoy of Hope’s senior director of communications and technology. Whether the nation is in a recession, depression or double-dip recession, “The fact of the matter is the number of the poor—people living in poverty—is increasing.”

The trend isn’t unique to Convoy of Hope. The number of Americans in need of emergency food assistance grew from 21.4 million in 1997 to 37 million last year, and the number of “food insecure” rose 36 percent since 2009 to 49 million Americans, according to Feeding America (formerly America’s Second Harvest), the nation’s largest network of food banks. A recent Census report shows 14 percent of Americans are living in poverty, up 1 percent over the previous year.

Homeless shelters tell a similar story as the number of those needing assistance has doubled, or even quadrupled in some places. Many of the clients are newly homeless after losing their jobs and their homes in foreclosure.

Despite overall declines in charitable giving, Nene says Convoy of Hope is finding that many Americans are willing to give sacrificially to help the poor. “It never ceases to amaze me how the people in this country will support those that are hurting, those that are suffering.”