

Rick Del Rio's Church and Partners Contribute 50,000 New Coats to Sandy Victims

Lower East Side churches and volunteers distributed 5,000 coats, scarves, boots and other winter supplies at the schoolyard at PS 34 in New York Saturday, in the shadow of the power plant that darkened lower Manhattan during Superstorm Sandy.

The only Manhattan location is one of 11 regional hubs created by a unique partnership between American Red Cross, Somebody Cares America, New York Christian Resource Center and local faith-based groups that collectively distributed 50,000 coats and more last weekend to communities most directly impacted by the storm.

"We are delighted to see the Red Cross partner with us in this way," one of the organizers, Pastor Rick Del Rio from Abounding Grace Ministries, said. "Though power has returned to Lower Manhattan, the lingering effects of the storm are still being felt. What better way to warm the hearts of children and families during the holidays, then by warming their physical bodies first."

Last weekend's clothing distribution marks the return of the pop-up relief site that became the largest in Manhattan in the week following Sandy. Organized by a grass-roots network of churches and community groups on Tuesday after the storm, they provided hot meals, water, non-perishable food and other needed supplies to 20,000 people over five days.

"When you marry the resource base with groups like Red Cross and Somebody Cares with the grass-roots sensibility and the relational equity that exists with faith-based groups and community groups on the ground, special things happen," Del

Rio said in a video posted at a day after the outreach. "That's definitely been our story following Hurricane Sandy. The silver lining to this superstorm has been the way that community has unfolded so organically so dramatically for the benefit of so many."

"Congregations can be effective first responders during crises because we know the needs of our communities, and have earned the trust of our neighbors," said Pastor Guy Wasko of Trinity Grace Church, another of the organizers. "When emergency response groups work together with us, we can minimize gaps and match relief to the greatest need. This is what it means to be a good neighbor."

On Friday afternoon the American Red Cross shipment arrived in a 53' tractor trailer, which volunteers unloaded, sorted and prepared for distribution on Saturday.

Del Rio explained the churches' commitment to ongoing relief work a month after the storm: "Churches that fail to meet the needs of their communities fail to reflect the Christ we celebrate at Christmas. We've lived in and served this neighborhood for over 30 years.

"When a power plant exploded in our backyard, and people lost their homes and businesses and so much more in the flood, we couldn't sit around and wait for others to bring healing. We were compelled to respond, and will continue to do so as long as the need remains."