



'You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'
Deuteronomy 15:10-11

In this newsletter:

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- 2) Our new General Store
- 3) A full year of the Worship Wagon

Welcome to the 2015 Hope in the Streets newsletter. As I did last year at this time, I'm sitting down to write this note just after Thanksgiving. We are thankful to God for placing us in the middle of this ministry where we can serve others, right here in the heart of Kansas City. We have been blessed with volunteers who give of their valuable time so generously to serve on the Vittle Van. And we are thankful for the partner organizations that provide us with water, food, and supplies at little to no cost to our organization. On a personal note, we are thankful that our son, daughter, and daughter-in-law were able to come home from Denver and stay with us several days over the Thanksgiving holiday week this year!

By the numbers – a summary of services provided this year

So far in 2015, we have delivered 6,919 meals to our friends on the streets with one more month to go before the end of the year. On this pace, 2015 will be a record year in terms of the number of meals served (over 7,000 meals)! We have also provided other essential supplies to the homeless, including so far this year 406 pairs of socks, 136 hygiene kits, 119 blankets, plus several hats, gloves, shoes, and so on.

As we do every year, in the late fall we began our annual Winter Warmth Kit campaign. This year we built 22 kits, and have already handed 9 out in the last few weeks. We reserve these for the hardcore homeless population in Kansas City – those individuals who we know are truly living outdoors throughout the winter season.

Our new General Store

For the past few years, we kept some more expensive items on the Vittle Van (such as tents and sleeping bags) for handing out on an as-needed basis week-to-week. We always used discretion and were careful to hand out these items only as needed. In fact, we started using an iPad application to track every person we gave these items to.

Based on a suggestion from one of our homeless friends, we are trying an experiment in the way we distribute some of these items to the homeless. For the foreseeable future, we will stop handing these items out of the Vittle Van for free, and we will start making these items available for sale at a substantial discount through a new "General Store".

We are partnering with Hope Faith Ministries since they have a physical location that is open six days a week, and homeless individuals can visit that location for a host of vital services during the day. If the people we serve on the streets would like to receive items like tents, sleeping bags, cots, lanterns or backpacks, etc., they can purchase them for a small fee from the General Store that we operate at the Hope Faith facility.

Hope in the Streets will buy these items like we always have, but we won't give them away for free going forward. Instead we'll subsidize the cost of these items, and we believe this will have the effect of instilling a sense of value in those items by the folks purchasing them. Most of the homeless folks we serve can't even get themselves to a Walmart, K-Mart, or similar stores, so even if they could afford the full price, they can't easily get to and from a store to buy these items.

We hope we can solve up to four problems with the new General Store concept: 1) Provide access to these items for those who can't make their way to discount stores that are typically situated in the suburbs, 2) Provide these items at a steep discount so homeless folks can easily afford them, 3) Create a sense of value for these items that we weren't doing before when we handed them out for free (so they aren't considered a "disposable" item), and 4) Directing homeless folks to the full range of daily services that Hope Faith provides.

We'll let you know how this new idea works out in our next newsletter.

A full year of the Worship Wagon

In last year's newsletter I mentioned a new program that we are calling the Worship Wagon, and at that time we had only tried it one time (on the coldest day of 2014 as it turns out). This program has fully launched as of January 12, 2015, and we have been delivering weekly church services every single week since. We partnered with Bruce McGregor of Freedom Fire to launch this new program, and Bruce and I are committed to making sure we host church services every Monday – come rain or shine, blistering heat or bone chilling cold!

We started the service with very few preconceived notions of how it would work and have let God direct us over time. We learned a lot of valuable lessons along the way and we feel like we have a solid and sustainable program after a year of valuable experiences.

Rather than move our church service around week to week, as we thought we would do early on, we have settled on a semi-permanent location for the time being. We found protection from most of the elements under the bridge at 1st & Grand, and have decided to focus on that location each week. We have cover from the rain and snow, and much of the wind is blocked here too. The acoustics are amazing, and everybody knows we'll be there each week so it's easy for our regular attendees to remember where to go on Monday evenings.

We also learned that we could partner with suburban church groups to help staff the weekly services. We have 4 partner church groups (Community Covenant, Desoto Youth Ministries, Olathe Bible Church, and Freedom Covenant), where each of these church groups has committed to staffing one Monday service every Month. This also provides a ministry opportunity that benefits the church groups as much as it does the homeless folks they are serving 😊

For most of the year our attendance ranged from 50 to 100 folks each week, but I suspect our numbers will drop off as winter arrives. Even if we only have 10-20 folks on hand during the bitter cold winter evenings, we will continue to consider this program to be a huge success. Check in at our website at <http://WorshipWagon.org> to see photos, videos, and blog updates that we add each month. There is also helpful information on what to expect should you decide to attend one of our Monday services ... we would love to see you there sometime.



Wrapping up

Hopefully you have visited the newly designed websites for both Hope in the Streets and the Worship Wagon. Early in the year I spent several weeks redesigning these websites to make them more informative and interactive, and to generally modernize them as well. Please remember to check in now and again at both sites to keep up on our progress with these important ministries.

We are proud to report again this year that there is no administrative overhead at Hope in the Streets ... every penny of every dollar we receive goes directly to providing much needed benefits to the poor and homeless in Kansas City. There are no salaries, no office supplies being purchased, no marketing expenses, and no office space to lease. It's just us and our volunteers, and a desire to help those less fortunate. If you would like to support our efforts, please visit our website at <http://HopeInTheStreets.org> and click on the "Donations" link on the left side of the page.

To those who have donated so generously to our foundation, we and the homeless we serve are grateful. If you like what we are doing and how we are doing it, please help spread the word. Tell your friends, family, and co-workers about Hope in the Streets, and with God's grace we can continue to serve the poor and homeless here in Kansas City.

Sincerely,

Joe Ratterman

on behalf of the Hope in the Streets family