

DECEMBER 2011



*Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart;
then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in
all your work and in everything you put your hand to.*

*There will always be poor people in the land.
Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your
brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.*

Deuteronomy 15:10-11

Welcome to the 2011 Hope in the Streets annual newsletter. I'm writing this year's letter while traveling on business in London, England. While homelessness isn't talked about as much here, it is certainly present on the streets of London if you take just a few steps off the typical tourist paths.

For example, if you walk along the southern side of the Thames in central London (known as "The South Bank"), where all the vendor booths, restaurants, street actors, and the London Eye are located, you won't see any hints of homeless individuals. Cross back over to the north side, and head just one block east of Big Ben, and you'll see several homeless individuals with makeshift camps along the riverbank walkway. On my way in to the office today (Sunday afternoon), down a popular alley that hosts several bars and eateries, I walked past an individual who had obviously slept in the doorway of one of the shop owners last night. By the time the smartly dressed young executives show up again tomorrow evening for their after-work pint of Guinness, the gentleman I saw today will have fully vanished from view. Homeless problems are likely found everywhere; you just don't see it unless you pay attention.

Unfortunately, we know that we can't solve the homeless problem everywhere around the world. In fact, we likely can't even fix the problem in our Kansas City home town. Part of the reason the "problem" can't be fixed is that it's not just one problem, its many problems. We have learned that "homelessness" is a symptom or result, something many people have in common, stemming from other underlying actual problems. However, "homelessness" isn't the actual problem. The real problems are alcohol and drug addiction, psychological and/or mental disorders, physical impairments, major debt or tax liabilities, previous legal infractions, etc. These issues, among others, often lead individuals to a state of homelessness, but fixing the "home" part of homelessness doesn't begin to address the individual's underlying problem(s). If society believes "homelessness" is a problem, then the obvious reaction is to try to find "homes" for the homeless individuals, and voilà, problem solved. If only it were that easy.

Hope in the Streets, therefore, continues our mission of serving the homeless in Kansas City, by getting to know the individuals one by one, name by name, face by face. Our Vittle Van program takes us out in the streets twice each week and provides opportunities for our volunteers to get to know our many repeat customers, while serving 60 to 100 meals each night. We will have served over 6,500 meals by the time 2011 comes to a close. Our volunteers are each committed to coming out on the van frequently enough to get to know our customers on a personal basis, which reinforces our goal of deeply understanding the issues our customers are dealing with. Along the way, we also emphasize delivering our meals with a smiling face, warm handshake, and authentic and genuine dialogue.

Taking the next step, beyond providing a meal and an encouraging word, Hope in the Streets introduced the Lazarus program early in the year. We identified two individuals to bring into the program and proceeded to wrap our arms around them with a goal of helping them move off the streets and back into an active and responsible member of society, as you and I know it.

The first candidate made good progress over the first 4 months in the program, but eventually decided to exit the program and found alternate support with a new boyfriend and left the Kansas City area. We are hopeful that she will continue with some of the good habits and lifestyle changes that we were coaching her through, and the best we can hope for is that God used us where he needed us at the time and that the fruits of our labor will pay off for the candidate down the road.

The second candidate is still with us in the program and is doing extremely well. He has held down employment for a majority of the year, taken over his apartment contract, built a small savings account, become part of our Olathe Bible Church community, participated regularly in one of the church small groups, held himself (for the most part) to a structured budget, and reached an agreement with the US government to settle all previous tax liabilities. He is personally responsible at this point for 80% of his expenses, and will take on 100% of his expenses within the next 2 to 3 months. Hope in the Streets carried his expenses over the last year, transitioning those expenses over to him a little each month while he secured employment and began to establish himself. We counseled him on job searching, managing a budget, key interpersonal skills, and tried to incorporate him into our lives and society in general. Some of the issues that were affecting him prior to joining the program still remain (in varying degrees), but we are working with him on these issues and we are hopeful that he will have the tools and focus needed to continue on his own as he graduates in the next few months.

Over the course of the year, we learned that the time and energy needed to support a candidate in the Lazarus program is more than we originally expected. Going in, we thought we could manage 2 or more candidates at a time, but after a year of experience, we will limit our commitment to one individual at a time going forward. When you pull somebody out of their street environment, however terrible it was, they are still going to need a lot of new support to replace the old support channels they previously had. Our organization is relatively small, and it takes a serious time commitment from each of our board members to adopt a candidate into the Lazarus program. In the future, if we can find additional dedicated volunteers, we may consider expanding the program. It's not easy work, and at times the candidates can appear to be unappreciative of the sacrifices being made on their behalf. We know in our hearts, however, that we are making a huge difference in the lives of our Lazarus candidates, and that God is blessing our efforts along the way.

As the words to a familiar song go "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas", and so our Winter Warmth Kit program is stocked up and ready to go again this year. The kits are assembled and we already started handing them out. We would like to thank those who have donated cash and/or supplies, and also send thanks to our volunteers for putting the kits together. This is the program that got us started in 2004, and it will be our 8th consecutive year handing out these winter survival kits.

In providing our outreach services to the poor and Homeless in Kansas City, Hope in the Streets employs a directed and "individual" approach, ensuring that only those who are truly in need receive benefits from our foundation. There is no administrative overhead in our program ... every penny of every dollar we receive goes directly to providing much needed benefits. There are no salaries being paid, no office supplies being purchased, no third party contracts, 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 donate, please visit our website at <http://www.HopeInTheStreets.org> and click on the "Donations" link on the left side of the page or you can send a check or money order to:

Hope in the Streets
PO Box 261
Stilwell, KS 66085

To those who have donated so generously to our foundation, we and the homeless we serve are grateful. Since we are operating our foundation as a "Zero Overhead" program, our only way of attracting new donations is by word of mouth. If you like what we are doing and how we are doing it, please help spread the word. Feel free to forward this newsletter. 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