

## NYC Thanksgiving Wrap Up 2008

Well I finally have some free time to sit down and collect my thoughts on our recent outreach in NYC. In case you missed our prior email, we teamed up with Mercy Chefs and once again joined the Bowery Mission in NYC to help feed the needy in NYC. In the past The Bowery served around 2400 Thanksgiving meals. We took Mercy One and the brand new Mercy Two to help them reach even more people this year. The official count was over 3400 meals, praise God!

This count however doesn't accurately reflect the meals that we helped prepare that week. There were five other outreaches during the week where full Thanksgiving meals were served, they amounted to over 1100 meals, which included our last outing where we fed almost 500, but more on that later. And while these meals were being prepared, the Bowery still feeds breakfast, lunch and dinner on a regular basis. This week we saw over 250 people come in to eat for each meal and yes our crew also helped prepare and serve these meals as well. Someone asked me how many turkeys did we use, we seem to have lost count after 500 and its anybody's guess after that!

To say that we were kept busy would be an understatement. I couldn't have asked for a better crew to work with, from the folks who came with us from Relief Ministries CC Sarasota, to the Mercy Chefs, to the staff of the Bowery (some of which volunteered to stay up all night with us) and even our cousins from upstate NY, you all were the best!!!

To be honest we really had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. None of us had done anything like this before and a lot of what we were doing was new even to The Bowery staff. It didn't take us long to get going though. Most of the Sarasota crew met up in Virginia Beach on Friday. Gary had an outreach to feed over 100 people and immediately put us to work. They were raising money for a family to go to Russia to adopt a baby boy. I'm told the dinner raised more than \$7000! Oh, did I mention that it was freezing cold and windy that night! I couldn't get started without putting on my long johns; we are from Florida you know!

We arrived in NYC late Saturday night. Unfortunately our GPS doesn't account for the fact that we can't go over certain bridges or through certain tunnels with our commercial kitchens. We once again were lost getting to the Bowery and somehow ended up in Harlem ! But God was good and eventually we made our way to The Bowery. It was fun with two trucks pulling two 32' trailers through the tiny streets of NYC!

Sunday morning we were up and serving breakfast and got right into the food prep. I had to go pick up Dave, a Mercy Chef, from the airport and along with Mary Jo we took off for the Bronx to go over the logistics of the two outreaches for Thanksgiving. I was the only one who had visited the sites and would be in Staten Island on Thanksgiving and they needed to see who, what and where as they'd be handling these outreaches for us. After getting back to the Bowery we soon discovered that we'd be working 24 hour shifts immediately through what turned out to be about 9 PM on Thanksgiving night. We were not prepared for this so immediately we had to switch things up so that everyone had

some time to sleep. Not a single member of our crew complained a bit about the new schedule and as some of us went to bed, the rest kept right on working. On Monday we decided to change the shifts up a bit and had hoped to have a little time off on Tuesday morning to do some sight seeing, but this was not to be. We kept right on working. A few of the crew gave up 2 hours of sleep to run to Times Square and back and a few of us rode the Staten Island Ferry at night over and back for the Thanksgiving outreach and on the way back we took a walk to the Twin Towers site, but other than that, it was all work!

As I mentioned, the crew was great! I don't recall one time where someone complained or where anyone got upset with anyone else. There were a couple of attitude checks here and there, but never anything that amounted to anything. We were working on very little sleep for several days but God was faithful and through His strength we were able to get the job done that He had commissioned us to do! A special thanks to Bernard and Ally, two Bowery students who volunteered to work through every night with us, they were a true example and blessing!

The four outreaches we did on Thanksgiving didn't have the numbers we had hoped for, but it was a new outreach for each location and we weren't the least bit discouraged, tired yes, discouraged no! The doors that were opened and the ministry that happened that day were amazing. I've already gotten word back from a couple of the churches and people who came for Thanksgiving dinner have already started going to church. We won't know this side of heaven how the seeds that were planted turn out, but we can already see God clearly moving because we were all faithful to what God had called us each to do! Thanks to all, especially the church and community volunteers, you have truly made a difference in eternity for your faithfulness!

The last outreach we participate in was on Friday for lunch. I was told to expect around 125, but elected to take enough food for about 300. Half of our crew had already headed for home and that left us short staffed. Three students from the Bowery joined us and we headed out. While setting up, two guys from Sarasota who had been helping at the Bowery rode up on their bikes to say hi. They started to leave and I told them we needed some help. With the two of them, we had exactly enough help to do what we needed to do, including ministry since the ministry that normally did that outreach on Fridays took the day off! We got the food heated up and popped the window open. Boy were we surprised, there was no one around when we pulled up and now there was a huge line! We started feeding people and the line never seemed to end. We had plenty of side dishes, but only enough turkey for about 300 or so. I kept shoving pans of food in the ovens to heat them up and even made some extra gravy. Somehow we ended up with exactly the same amounts of everything to match how much turkey we had at the end. When I figured we had about 20 meals left I went outside to cut the line off and to my surprise there was only about 20 people in line! I stood there in case anyone else came up late and a few people did. I told them that we only had enough food left to feed the people who were in line in front of me, but if they wanted to wait we'd see what was left. We ended up feeding them as well. Our final count was 484 meals served that day! We were shocked and amazed, but really with God what else could we expect! We cleaned

up and headed back to the Bowery. It had been a long week. We went out to dinner with some friends and then hit the hay!

Saturday we all took off to our different directions, but not before our pickup was spray painted and the friendly NYC police department gave us a parking ticket! We got stuck in bumper to bumper traffic for over 3 hours on the NJ Turnpike and what should've taken 7-8 hours took us 13 hours to get back to Virginia . Our flight was changed and then delayed!

I'd have to say that this was the most exciting trip that I've ever been apart of from the planning to the conclusion, but it was also the one with the most spiritual warfare that I've ever experienced. I can't imagine what God is going to do with what took place last week or with the doors that have been opened for years to come, but He had and has a plan and many, many, many people were faithful to His call on their lives and He alone is responsible for the results!

Also while in NY and busy working, we didn't have much contact with anyone outside of the Bowery to do ministry with, that was left up the remnant who live and minister there on a regular basis. God called us to support them and in doing so, He opened up many doors of ministry for us with those we were supporting and working alongside. The ministry that He allowed us to do in this capacity was unimaginable to us before we went and still blows our minds now that we're home! We were in the right place at the right time and faithfully did what God had wanted us to do so that His kingdom can be forever changed as He works out all the details!

I had asked for some input from those who traveled with us and here are a couple of the responses:

From Melissa:

This trip to NYC has changed my life, and even in ways I haven't seen yet. People can be in need no matter what their financial situation is, if they are homeless or not, and no matter whom they are. It all amounts to everyone that doesn't know God as their personal savior and doesn't have a relationship with him are truly in need. It was awesome to see the "house" guys be a living example of that. A lot of them have really messed up their lives; some even came right off the streets, but in the midst of all that, they praise the Lord with all their heart, and are no longer "in need." Looking back only a few days later, the highlight of my trip would have to be meeting all sorts of people, and hearing their stories.

From Jon:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" - Ps. 133:1

Praise God for His faithfulness, love, and provision! Our trip to NYC was truly blessed.

As we approached Thanksgiving week and anticipated the mission ahead of us I wasn't sure what to expect. When I consider the vast number of people suffering from poverty, homelessness, and addiction in a city as large as NY, I often tend to become overwhelmed by the insurmountable need, and I wonder what difference I could possibly make. What a blessing it was to see over the course of the week how the church, serving together in oneness of mind and heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is able to make an impact far greater than any lone Christian could. I was so encouraged to see the amazing work being done at the Bowery Mission on a daily basis, specifically in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and was blessed to take part in the work of doubling their impact this Thanksgiving. Also, it was quite a faith-builder to see how God provided for every need that arose during the week ... from the smallest details, to the biggest setbacks.

Beyond this, my spirit was truly lifted up by the fellowship and building of relationships with our brothers and sisters from Calvary Chapel of Sarasota, as well as the new relationships formed with our fellow servants from the Bowery and Mercy Chefs. I'm still gleaning much insight for my own life from what I've seen in their walks with the Lord during our time together.

Many of the staff and residents at the Bowery expressed deep gratitude to God for our service, and a sincere appreciation of our love for the Lord. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, "For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ". What a joyful thought, that our Father is receiving thanksgiving and praise as a result of our humble service! The mere fact that we could live and work together in such close quarters, and serve on such a vigorous and continuous schedule with so little quarreling and discord is truly a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence with us, and a testimony of the love of Christ to those around us. May they know we're His disciples by our love for one another, and may our gracious Savior and Lord Jesus Christ cause every seed that was planted to bear much fruit ... for His glory!