

Our stop at 51st and Broadway is the site of the Times Square Church. It's housed in an old theater, with a large marquee stretching over the sidewalk, and recessed doorways, seemingly a good spot for an encampment. It's usually very quiet, but last Saturday, it was busy. Andy Larivee arrived first and immediately began chatting up the clients.

There was an old man in a wheelchair sitting with a very large pile of his belongs behind him and surrounding him. Andy knelt to speak to him. First he asked his name, Harry. Harry asked, "Andy, why do you do this, and don't give me any of the wanting to help BS?" Andy replied, " For me it's the eye contact." Harry was a bit surprised.

Harry was a cantankerous client, at first he refused everything, then settled for some chili. He asked for a hoodie or a button down shirt. I was able to deliver a shirt and a sweater, but no hoodie. He grudgingly accepted them, though a friend next to him said, " If you won't take them I will."

Next to Harry was a woman sleeping on a sheet of cardboard and under a sheet of cardboard. She was barefoot. Next to her was a black plastic Chinese takeout container with some scraps of food in it. When we called to her she would not stir, then peeked out once and ignored us. As we were leaving, and the clothing van had gone Harry called out to Jackie and Chris that the woman needed pants and a blanket. His care came too late, the van with blankets and clothing had already left. Often the homeless will look out for each other, sometimes we ask them if there's anything an unresponsive neighbor needs. We have to remember to do it every time.

Down the street a bit was a young couple, a man and a woman lying on a piece of cardboard. Cardboard forms a thermal barrier that shields people from the cold and hard sidewalk. They were holding hands, and their hands were dirty. They were using a pile of their belongings as pillows. When I approached them they stirred, but stayed on their pallet. When the woman lifted her head it was revealed that she was using their dog, a large beautiful pit bull as a pillow. They didn't want anything, but accepted a handful of dog biscuits I had in my pocket. Later I brought them a dusty rose duvet cover someone in our church had contributed to use as a blanket.

At the clothing van Dianne met Charlie and Christine, another young couple. Charlie said they have known each other since they were 9. He was excited because he had found a job and wanted some nice clothes to wear for work. He kept holding up what we offered and asked for Christine's approval.

At our first stop we were met by Alberto, a regular volunteer. He said he was just there as a client that night. He's been through periods of homelessness and being housed.

Some of the housing was made possible by the Go Fund Me our church sponsored. He's homeless again, sleeping on trains, and every now and then staying with his parents. A few years ago he came down with MS. It has progressed quickly, he no longer has much use of his left arm and hand. This will make it hard, if not impossible to find work. We've tried to get him into the shelter system and eventually a housing voucher through a group called the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing. So far to no avail. Please pray for him.

Thanks to all who donated and worked to serve our clients. Bev, Annie, and Wally for making countless sandwiches, Jackie Grant and Chris Novak for distributing food; Diane and Steve and Terry for running the clothing van, the hardest job on the street. Special thanks to Steve for calmly de-escalating some tense moments. To our ever present Iorgo. And welcome back to Andy Larivee!

Ron Sopyla