

Compelled by Love to Love

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins, unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapels reach out to residents impacted by Hurricane Sandy in Far Rockaway, NY



Pastor Ray Dash of The Rock Christian Fellowship in Newark, NJ, prays with a Far Rockaway, NY, resident. The woman said her and her sister live on an upper floor; but they were cold, without electricity. Ray shared that salvation isn't earned by good deeds, but

belongings were not harmed, as she and her sister live on an upper floor; but they were cold, without electricity. Ray shared that salvation isn't earned by good deeds, but comes by trust in Christ's righteousness.



Far Rockaway residents line up to receive free hot food shortly after Hurricane Sandy. Many inhabitants of the Queens, NY, neighborhood lacked electricity for months.

For Consideration:

Are you aware of, and quick to minister to, the needs of others?

“Thank you so much, but we just can't accept any more donations,” Pastor Drew Segawa of Calvary Chapel At The Cross in Queens, NY, had told yet another eager donor. “People are bringing items faster than storm victims are taking them. And we don't have much storage space to save things for later.”

Immediately after Hurricane Sandy's waters devastated parts of New York City (NYC) in November 2012, Drew and other believers from area churches had rushed to supply people's physical and spiritual needs. The group's haste meant that they had only a small collection of food, flashlights, blankets, and cleaning supplies to give away on



Shar-ron Corley, center, from The Rock in Newark serves hot fish meals in Queens.



Parts of Queens were destroyed by fires, which were caused by the storm. DOD photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley

their first Saturday of outreach. But they were given so much by drive-by donors that they left with more than they had brought. The following Saturday, they again turned away potential donations.

Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do." So Moses gave a commandment ... saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much. Exodus 36:4-7



Alix Jean-Charles, left, of CC At The Cross in Queens, explains the Gospel to a young Rockaway resident. She and her brother, who are immigrants from Nigeria, both gave their lives to Christ.

"It's one thing to read about Jesus multiplying the five loaves and two fish in Matthew 14; it's another thing to see God providing," commented Jasmin Lebrón, also of CC At The Cross. "We had very little to offer, materially. But when we came together as His people in reliance on the Lord, He multiplied what little we gave. The supply just got bigger and bigger, no matter how much people took. Seeing this has been so stretching for my faith."

The hurricane's submersion of parts of NYC and surrounding areas flooded vehicles and houses, caused extensive electrical outages, and began the growth of severe mold—which has destroyed homes even in high-rise apartment buildings. In response, Calvary Chapels from across the states of New York and New Jersey have jumped to serve residents of the densely-populated area. Drew and two pastor friends, George Hillman and Richard Ortiz, drove around



Jana Hillman, left, Pastor George Hillman's wife, encourages a woman who was already facing personal struggles before Hurricane Sandy struck. The woman expressed being overjoyed at the love and concern of Jesus shown to her by the outreach team.

together days after the superstorm, assessing damage and asking God to reveal a place for their congregations to minister effectively. "In most areas, we came across

other disaster-relief agencies," commented Pastor George. George leads CC Montclair, NJ, which is 12 miles west of Manhattan, NY. "But in one neighborhood, no one was

helping. As we got out of the car and started talking to people, one woman began pouring out the community's frustrations: how cold they were, without electricity, and how forgotten they felt. We knew immediately that it was where we needed to be." The neighborhood is called Far Rockaway and is in an economically-depressed region of Queens' Rockaway Peninsula, which is part of Long Island. The outreach has grown to a multi-church effort each Saturday to demonstrate Jesus' love in one of the nation's most ethnically diverse areas.

church. But we continue to believe God's Word as Proverbs 19:17 declares, 'He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.' We seek to bless people with what the Lord has given us. So we decided to take discipleship to another level and show Jesus' love in this way. And it's been cool to watch people step up and accept that challenge." Ray took five men from the church and two of his own four children to serve on The Rock's first Saturday in Far Rockaway.

Conduits of Grace

"Immediately after the storm, I felt the Lord was stirring my heart for the urban areas that had been affected," recounted Pastor Ray Dash Jr. of The Rock Christian Fellowship in Newark, NJ. "That's the heart of our ministry; we love being on the streets. So when Drew and George invited us to join them in Far Rockaway, we responded quickly." At the fellowship he leads in Newark, Ray continued, "Many whom we minister to live in despair. We're not a rich

Ray explained that one of the ministry group members, Rajaan Dixon, was until 2008 regarded by Newark area gang members as "something of an icon on the streets." But since personally experiencing Jesus Christ's transforming power, Ray continued, "Rajaan has grown in the Lord and become an integral part of our outreaches. He worked the hamburger and hotdog grill in Far Rockaway—and he doesn't let anybody slip by without hearing something about the Lord! He's not pushy, but he's not quiet either. He has a lot of life."



Jerry Weissman of CC At The Cross high-fives a young boy who told Jerry that since his earthly father is not around, he asks Jesus every night to take care of his family.



Pastor George Hillman of CC Montclair, NJ, right, talks with a man impacted by Sandy.



Pastor Billy Wheeler of CC Everett, WA, teaches an unexpectedly large crowd in a tent at Calvary Chapel's first service in Far Rockaway. Three consecutive services were needed to give all an opportunity to attend that January day. Photo by Kimmi Hartfield

One Saturday, remembered Arlene Stoller of CC Montclair, "We met a woman named Rosania. Probably in her 80s, she lives in a fourth-floor apartment that had—after the storm—no electricity, no water, and no elevator. Without access to her vertigo medicine, she fell inside her apartment. She was discovered by the police because her son Walter in Oregon couldn't get in touch with her and asked them to check on her. They helped her, but she still had no way to talk personally with Walter. Then we showed up with food, and someone pulled out their cell phone for her to call him. We got to hear her express to him her gladness at talking to him and her anguish about the situation. It was wonderful to connect them."

Pointing Up

Jasmin Lebrón, who grew up in NYC, came to know Jesus as a young adult while residing in Florida. When she moved back north

in 2009, "I experienced culture shock," Jasmin said. "As a new creature in the Lord accustomed to the warmth and openness of Southern Christian culture, it was a hard transition. In New York, many have a mindset that says, *We're invincible. We're the financial capital of the world. We can handle anything.* It's hard to minister to that self-sufficient mentality. It seems impenetrable—but it's not impenetrable to God's Word. And in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, His Word has softened hearts and brought people to repentance. That's amazing."

For the word of God is living and powerful.

Hebrews 4:12a

However, continued Jasmin, "Not everyone is open and receptive. Many have rejected God outright, forthrightly telling us, 'I just want food—not a Bible.' That's painful to

hear. But we continue praying for them. We don't push it on them, but we don't give up on them either."

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

John 1:11-12

Pastor Drew was challenged by meeting Dawn, a mother of five whose youngest is nine months old. Weeks after the hurricane, Drew recounted: "Dawn hasn't been off the island since the storm, and she spends all day, each day, looking for clothes and supplies for her kids. That motherly resolve is remarkable. And we want to exhibit that type of care to these people—because the



Pastor Drew Segawa, left, of CC At The Cross, asks God for healing, blessing, and knowledge of Himself for a Far Rockaway resident who wasn't feeling well.

"The need is greater than ever before. ... both for resources and for servants of Christ."

Pastor Drew Segawa of CC At The Cross

"People were asking us, 'When are you going to start that study here?'"

So with a hastily-erected tent and a vision for a church plant, the believers held the first such gathering on the new lot on January 26th. Pastor Luis Solis of CC Kearny, NJ, who has served as an advisor

to Drew because of his previous disaster-relief experience, said, "We expected to hold a Bible study with 10-15 people. To our surprise, the tent [which holds 50-60] was filled. Then people wanted a second service because so many couldn't fit inside. And there were still people left out, necessitating a third one! We were shocked. The next day,

Lord loves them that much. We are available each Saturday to give them food and clothes—but also to say 'God loves you, and He knows what you're going through.' We want to point people beyond ourselves to the One who gives us hope, Jesus Christ."

Today, Drew added, "The need is greater than ever before. Right after a disaster, people rush to serve. But now as the weather gets colder and the world moves on, the need is huge—both for resources and for servants of Christ."

After ministering for a few months from a temporarily-available parking lot, the churches were granted use of a large, empty lot on the same intersection. Since the believers began serving in Far Rockaway, Drew stated, "We'd been asking people if they were interested in attending a Bible study." By December, Drew continued,



Pastor Luis Solis of CC Kearny, NJ, and Arlene Stoller, center, of CC Montclair, talk with a resident who was interested in attending a Bible study. Photo by Jasmin Lebrón



Area resident Marylyn is prayed for by volunteers including Pastor Claude Stauffer, in red, of CC of Hope in Amityville, NY. She was distressed as most of her belongings, many bearing memories of her late husband, had to be thrown away. *Photo by Jeff Cole*

Drew and I sat weeping. We are absolutely overwhelmed at what God has done.”

Keeping Divine Appointments

Since the storm, reported Pastor Claude Stauffer from Calvary Chapel of Hope in Amityville, NY, “I’m in awe of how perfectly the Lord has maneuvered us around to meet

people’s exact needs.” The church’s building in Amityville, about 20 miles east of Queens along Long Island’s southern coast, has become a staging area from which local and visiting ministry teams deploy regularly.

In mid-November when a group from a ministry called Firefighters For Christ served alongside CC of Hope, Claude dispatched the team to go assist a friend who was helping his neighbor clean up. As the residents and believers all worked together, Claude said, “They learned that the man who lived there was a firefighter. So without our even knowing it, the Lord arranged for us to send firefighters to serve a firefighter.” After they finished working, a team member explained the Gospel to the family. In response, Claude recalled, “The entire family of mom, dad, 20-year-old daughter, and teenage son accepted the Lord.” The next week, Claude and others assisted a woman who had lost her home in the storm—and whose mother had then passed away, days later, unrelatedly. “In that tragic situation,” Claude continued, “the Lord provided a grieving woman with a grieving pastor who could empathize—I had gotten a call in the night that same week informing me that my mom had passed away.” Then as the group worked in the woman’s yard, Claude

conversed with her neighbor and learned that he needed to have sand bags moved. “As we began helping him move them, a team leader who had come from upstate New York to serve started talking to him,” Claude remembered. “The resident turned out to be in the sheriff’s department, and the man talking to him was a retired state trooper! So the Lord sent firefighters to serve a firefighter, a grieving pastor to comfort a grieving woman, and a former police officer to minister to a policeman. God is taking care of people—and what an incredible privilege it is to participate in His work.” ✨



Louis Colon of CC Orange County, NY, shares with Marylyn that she is much more valuable to Jesus than any of her destroyed possessions. *Photo by Jeff Cole*

For Reflection:

Are you cognizant of, and praising the Lord for, His direction in your life?

CC At The Cross, NY

atthecross.org
info@atthecross.org
 718-894-2394