

D.C. congregation gives homeless a ride to church

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Jill Peddycord and Gary Bradley bow their heads and pray in the front seats of a white van parked outside [Metropolitan Baptist Church](#) in the nation's capital.

Peddycord asks for God's blessing as they begin the weekly rounds of Metropolitan's transportation ministry.

Many churches provide rides to worship services for seniors and people with disabilities. Metropolitan takes transport a step further—sending a van to pick up women from several area homeless shelters.

Metropolitan has a long-standing ministry to homeless people, but it did not always include transportation.

“The purpose is to give them an opportunity to go to church,” Peddycord said. “It's an opportunity to introduce them to Jesus, who is called the bread of life in the Gospel of John, but they also need physical bread. We have to attend to both of those needs.”

With this in mind, Metropolitan serves breakfast and lunch to women who come from the shelters.

Metropolitan is not the only District of Columbia church to bring people from homeless shelters to services. Back to Basics, a nondenominational church, has a bus that usually can be found right behind Metropolitan's van.

Throughout the country, transportation ministries are targeting other populations as well.

[Westminster Presbyterian](#) in Greenville, S.C., gives free rides to people visiting a family member in prison. Chinese Bible Church of Greater Boston picks up college students on campuses to bring them to church. Still others drive members to and from doctor's appointments or the hospital, a service Black Rock Congregational Church in Fairfield, Conn., provides.

A recent National Council of Churches survey on health care ministries found that more than half the 6,000 congregations that responded offered transportation of some kind.

Metropolitan's transportation ministry started small, with Peddycord picking up a homeless woman she had invited to church in her own car.

The next week, the same woman brought several friends. Eventually, Peddycord convinced the church to let her use its van to bring people from the homeless shelters to church.

Each Sunday, a driver and another volunteer drive from the church to several locations, picking up as many as 20 people, most of them from women's shelters.

At one stop, Peddycord notices a woman reading in the lobby and asks if she'd like to come to church.

“Not today—maybe next week,” she responds.

A dozen women head to the van, some wearing a suit or Sunday dress, others in jeans. Most of them have been to the church before. One woman said she became a member last week.

Bradley, the driver, spent time in a shelter himself, and it was there he experienced a desire to come to church while listening to a choir on tape.

“I started in the back,” Bradley said, gesturing to the passenger section of the van. “Now I’m a driver.”

For Peddycord, this ministry is “where I could truly see the work of God—the hungry fed, the naked clothed and the good news given to the poor.”

That’s the goal, said Larry Sampson, who directs Metropolitan’s ministry to the homeless.

“There are certain people who don’t come to church for whatever reason,” Sampson said. “They may have been burned, they may be scared or just have never gotten into it. We have to take Christ outside the church to meet them where they are.”