

As cold lingers, churches open doors for ministry

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DALLAS (BP)—As hot as Dallas can be in the summer, temperatures become just as brutal in the winter. Pastor Chris Simmons and Cornerstone Baptist Church have learned it's always best to have a comfortable place to rest for those without one, to give them somewhere to shower, eat and clean their clothes while hearing the gospel.

Opened doors tend to open hearts. They know this.

Simmons and Cornerstone became acutely aware in January 2018 after a homeless man froze to death within eyesight of the church.

“That spurred us to begin looking at what we could do to keep our homeless neighbors safe in the wintertime,” Simmons said.



TBM volunteers prepare hot meals for unhoused people in Dallas who are seeking shelter from a winter storm. (TBM Photo)

Other shelters are available, with one 900-bed location filling up quickly and another with 100 beds doing the same. Texas Baptist Men volunteers provided more than 15,000 meals as of Jan. 18 to help local agencies feed individuals in shelters, and that ministry was continuing in light of a second arctic blast that hit North Texas early on Jan. 19.

However, many remain “shelter-resistant,” said Simmons, due to reasons such as the fear that a background check will reveal an arrest warrant, or they won’t be able to come and go as they wish.

Technically, per city policy, Cornerstone doesn’t offer a place to sleep. However, its warming center is a separate, on-campus building outfitted to do laundry. Open at all times, it isn’t unusual for guests to rest while there.

Bitterly cold temperatures across the country have brought at least 37 deaths nationwide, with another frigid wave set to descend in days. At times the wind chill has sunk to -25 degrees in Salinas, Kan., where Greg Savage is pastor of First Southern Baptist Church.

“My wife and I were talking this morning about how to do a warming area,” he said. “For right now, our church staff and deacons are watching out for widows and the homebound, offering to get them food and those sorts of things.

“People can’t be out in this weather very long,” said Savage, who has lived in Kansas for 30 years and in Salinas for the last nine.

In addition to the laundry center, Cornerstone offers a space with 19 showers in an adjacent building. At least one member of the church staff and two volunteers are always nearby.

Cornerstone also opens its doors in the summer as a cooling center when temperatures climb well over 100 degrees. Then and now, the offer is well-received.

“People are grateful to have a warm place and a meal,” Simmons said.

“If you don’t operate a warming center, I encourage them to volunteer at one. We have religious music and messages playing on TV at ours. The main responsibility of volunteers is to have gospel conversations with others. People tend to be open to that.”

Savage agrees on the central focus of such steps.

“At the heart of it, we need to keep looking for ways to give feet to the gospel,” he said. “We know the truths and how Christ died for us. That’s a message we share in a verbal way, but also must give hands and feet to let others see Jesus.”