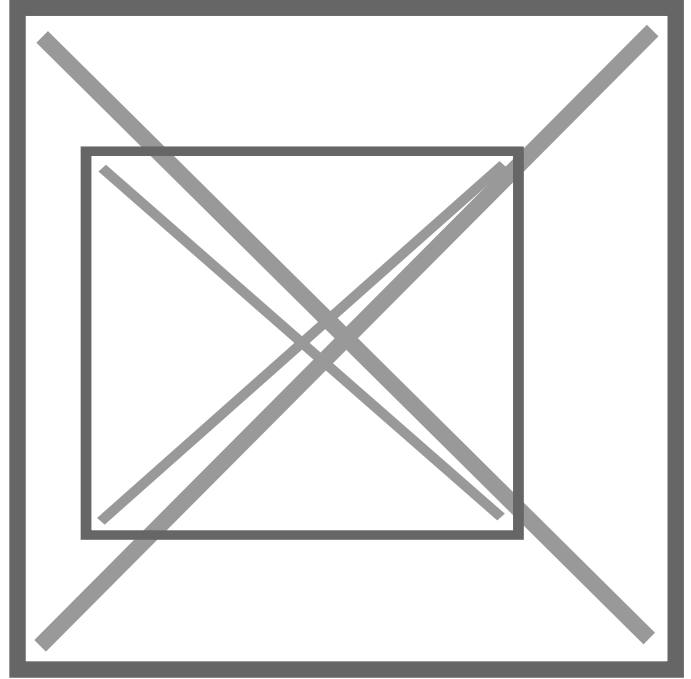


Compassion in action: Southeast Communities

by Pilar Martínez –



ENVOYS GILBERT AND Rosemary Reyes of the Southeast Communities Corps.

In the heart of Huntington Park, Calif., The Salvation Army's Southeast Communities Corps, under the leadership of Envoys Gilbert and Rosemary Reyes, is making a difference in the lives of those in the community.

Huntington Park is one of the poorest areas in Los Angeles County: 99 percent of the population are immigrants, gang activity is very high, and a large percentage of homeless people walk the city's streets without hope.

The Reyes, who give leadership to two ministries—a Spanish-speaking congregation and an English-speaking congregation—have developed a social service ministry that assisted more than 29,000 people in 2004.

The social service program is well known in the community. Approximately 70 families come to the corps every Thursday to receive food. Once a month, more than 400 elderly sign up to receive a box of groceries, made available through the food bank and donations from local schools. Unfortunately only 250 people can benefit from this help. "The need is great and each day it grows," said Reyes, "but unfortunately the economic help is ending and many of these services will stop."

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In one instance, more than 1,000 people were referred to an optometrist in one year. "One could recognize the people receiving his services in the community by the frames they wore!" Reyes said. When the doctor offering his services closed his business, the services ended.

The United Way, through The Salvation Army, helps low-income families pay their utility bills. This is a limited service and people must sign up and fill out the necessary paper work ahead of time.

Cleaning up

One of the services that has been very effective in Southeast Communities is the help The Salvation Army gives to the homeless. When the City of Huntington Park closed a mental hospital four years ago, many of the patients were left living in the streets. The Salvation Army saw the need and today approximately 70 to 100 homeless people, including women and children, come and line-up to eat lunch. For many it is the only meal they will have that day.

Envoys Reyes saw the needs of these people, who asked to use the bathroom on a regular basis to clean up and prepare for a job interview. He looked for resources to build showers and with the help of government donations and a local foundation, these homeless people now have the opportunity to shower and get clean in a dignifying way; if necessary, they also receive clean clothing. At the beginning, the corps didn't charge for this service and even provided towels. Unfortunately, after the government funding ended, the water and detergent bills were too high. A donation of \$1 is required, although no one is ever turned away.

Envoys Reyes have great heart for the people in their community and feel that they need to help all who come through their doors. "Once, a friendly woman approached us," recalled Reyes. "Her name was Frances Delgado. Frances and her boyfriend, Ismael, came to The Salvation Army three years ago. They needed food and a shower. They were living on the street, sleeping in parking lots, and involved in drugs and alcohol." That is no longer their situation, he explained.

"She has come from a depressing place, where she saw people die, to now having found the true meaning of life that only God can give. When we asked what The Salvation Army means to her, her answer was HOPE, the bright side of life."

The Salvation Army is an example of compassion in action a place where people are welcomed and loved. The community has seen what the Army does and for that reason the community respects and cares for the property. Many people have recovered the hope that was missing in their lives because of the help they received at the Army. The volunteers and workers at Southeast Communities work day in and day out without thinking of their corps' financial situation, but looking at their goal...souls for Christ.