

HEAD: Street Retreat—Lent 2006

SUBHEAD: The River in the Desert

“He commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff only: no bread, no wallet, no money in their purse...” *Mark 6:8*

A group of 16, 4 women and 12 men, set out on Palm Sunday, April 9<sup>th</sup> to live on the streets of Austin, Texas, for 72 hours in the *Mobile Loaves & Fishes (MLF) Street Retreat*. Their purpose was not to “experience homelessness” but to prepare themselves spiritually by opening up their hearts and minds for the resurrection of the Lord on Easter Sunday. This very diverse group was composed of different races, religions, and communities that represent the fusion *Mobile Loaves & Fishes* creates in the love of God and service of our brothers and sisters in need.

The group had a beautiful metaphor that symbolized their journey through that last week of Lent on the streets. The participants were floating down a river through a parched and desolate wasteland. Every now and then, they would be joined by a brother or sister who would bump into them. During this contact, there would be dialogue, prayer, love, and a sharing of fears and hopes. Then the person would float out of sight and a new human being would come up against them.

On the first night of the *Street Retreat* (Sunday), most of the participants slept on the front steps of the *First United Methodist Church* across from the State Capitol. The second night (Monday), some went to the Mid-Town RV Park where the *Mobile Loaves & Fishes Habitat on Wheels* program has several travel trailers. The last night (Tuesday), many slept on the floor at *Mission Possible*, where Brother Duane Severance’s mission is located.

Tuesday night, Brother Duane Severance (*see story on page 5*) conducted a Bible study for our homeless brothers and sisters and the *Street Retreat* participants joined in. Alan Graham, one of the founders and president of MLF, gave a powerful witness to the glory of God’s work in his life. Since it was Holy Week, the participants of the *Street Retreat* washed the feet of our homeless brothers and sisters in remembrance of Jesus’ act at the Last Supper.

Some of the most pressing issues for our brothers and sisters on the streets are food, shelter, and clothing. Their lives focus on these basic necessities, and although the *Street Retreat* participants did not have to take the clothing into consideration, the food was one of their main focuses as they went about their day with our brothers and sisters on the streets. Most of the day was spent praying and socializing. Participants could pop into local churches for services and a heart-to-heart with the Lord. The rest of the time, they would spend walking to the places where they could receive meals—the *University Church of Christ*, *First United Methodist Church*, *Caritas*, *Angel House*, and of course, the very popular MLF trucks.

John McNamara, a multi-*Street Retreat* veteran and a member of the MLF Board, brought it home when he mentioned having spent the night in a homeless shelter with one TV. There was no arguing over what show to watch—everyone was focused on the weather channel and what the weather would be like the next day.

One of the participants of the *Street Retreat* called John and mentioned she was a changed woman. A few nights after the *Street Retreat*, she went to a play. When she got out, she felt the need to go back to the streets to find her new friends and see how they were. At 10:00 P.M. she was on the steps of *First United Methodist Church*, looking for her friends. Indeed, from the experience of participants of prior *Street Retreats*, she will never be the same again.

“Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.”  
*Mother Teresa of Calcutta*