

Filling The Void: A Church Without Walls BY MOLLIE MYERS



Neither sleet, snow, ice, or driving rain keeps the mailman from delivering. And neither does it keep one of Tulsa's brightly shining ministries from bringing Good News and great lunches to hurting hearts.

Filling The Void was founded by three guys who grew up in Tulsa – Chris Brooks, Erin Bjornberg, and Kelly Swan – who are connected by their faith, friendship, and calling to help the homeless and needy. The ministry celebrated its 10-year anniversary in October by serving their 60,000th sack lunch.

The ministry meets on a parking lot downtown at the corner of 3rd and Detroit on Fridays. The scene looks a lot like a typical church service with two exceptions: everything takes place outside in all weather and there are no walls – literally or figuratively.

“We embrace folks. This is designed to be a safe haven and a refuge where lives are lifted up and burdens are laid down,” Kelly says.

“We continually remind our crowds that God cares a whole lot more about their future than what they’ve done in the past. We emphasize mercy and moving on to bigger and better things.”

Regulars gather early for a good “seat” even though there are no chairs. Friends greet each other with hugs, handshakes, laughter, smiles, and small-talk.

There’s worship through music, as artist Dave Lon sings with and for the crowd. Kelly, Erin, or another delivers a mini-sermon – a five to 10-minute message emphasizing hope, help, and healing in Christ. Prayer is offered and sack lunches are served. In all, it takes about 20 minutes.

The ministry’s origin is a story itself. Kelly and Erin had two separate encounters with a homeless person within a few days of each other in 2003. Kelly shared how he had been seeking God and asking to be used in the Kingdom. Within days he was approached by a homeless man over lunch and Kelly brushed him off, continuing on his way only to be immediately confronted by God with the missed opportunity.

Thankfully, Kelly turned around, sought the man out, found him, and asked him how he could help. The man requested prayer and Kelly obliged - then bought his new friend lunch. The encounter became a model for how the ministry interacts with people who call the streets home or a close neighbor.

When asked about 10 years of serving, Kelly replied, “We feel called to do this with our lives for the rest of our lives. We have a long-term vision to be out on the streets 365 days a year in multiple cities. God has provided for us every step. From donors, vendors, and volunteers to churches and companies who get involved. We are so grateful for everyone who comes alongside what we do.”

Approximately 1,200 people have served with Filling The Void. Volunteers stuff sack lunches, fold devotionals that go into the bags, deliver the lunches, and serve them one-by-one.

Everything in the bags is non-perishable, with the exception of an Arby’s or Chick-Fil-A sandwich that goes in right before an outreach and is still warm when received.

So far, there are three Filling The Void chapters – Tulsa, Denver, and Dallas. The ministry also has started some exploratory work in Phoenix, San Diego, Seattle, Portland, and Spokane.

Recipients of the lunches are helping with the expansion efforts. There’s an offering bucket at each outreach in Tulsa, which in turn funds outreaches in other cities.

“Think about that. The homeless are feeding the homeless. That fact alone changes so many misperceptions of who the homeless are. They’re givers, not takers, and they’ve already given more than \$3,000 to buy lunches for the people we serve in Denver,” Kelly says.

Unite My City exists to foster a sense of unity in the Body of Christ and is pleased to feature FTV, a registered 501 (c) 3, and its efforts to address the needs of the people who count FTV as their church. Volunteers are welcome to participate in being a part of this incredible ministry. For more information, visit FTV’s website at fillingthevoid.com or sign up to volunteer at fillingthevoid@hotmail.com.

Now, go! Be dangerous! 🇺🇸