



## From Soup to Sermons

A Homeless Ministry Expands by Starting a Church Just for Them

### THE CHURCH

SoupMobile Church in Dallas, Texas

### THE CHALLENGE

Help the homeless feel comfortable attending church.

### ONE BIG IDEA

Create a church that considers the homeless population's unique needs.

Daniel Rodriguez is blind and homeless, but he still finds his way to church every Sunday. He is a regular attendee of SoupMobile Church, a congregation well known in Dallas as the home church for the homeless.

"This is their baby, their church," founder and pastor David Timothy says of the homeless who attend. "In Dallas-Fort Worth, there are lots of wonderful, Spirit-filled churches. But if you're homeless, you don't have transportation to get to those churches, and even if you did, you might feel uncomfortable attending if you haven't bathed in a week."

Timothy, known locally as the Soup-Man, started SoupMobile Church in 2015 as the newest outgrowth of Soup-Mobile, a 15-year-old ministry to feed and house Dallas' homeless population.

"We always felt, over the years, that something was missing, and that was feeding their souls," Timothy says. "We've prayed with the homeless and shared Christ with them from the very beginning, so the church is a continuation of what we've always done."

Timothy chose to plant the church in the same neighborhood where many homeless already live. With the support of community partners and generous

donors, SoupMobile bought a little land and built a quaint white chapel. From the very beginning, the homeless have come. First, they filled the sanctuary. After about a year, the church had to set up a tent and chairs outside and pipe the sermon to overflow attendees. Soon, an additional tent and more chairs went up. Now they're up to six tents, and they see around 250 people every Sunday.

While community partners and donors give the church the money it needs to operate, volunteers provide the manpower. They serve as ushers, make up the prayer team and serve continental breakfast and coffee. And rather than passing a collection plate, the church gives each attendee \$2 so they can buy a little food afterward.

If the generosity of the community keeps the church doors open, the flow of the services ensures the homeless return each week. Timothy calls the service style a "Reader's Digest Condensed version," where there's no musical worship, and sermons last 20 minutes.

"It goes against the grain," Timothy says, "but we're not doing it to be unconventional. We're doing it because that's what our homeless population needs."

Attendees are often hesitant to leave their belongings on the streets for too long, so they appreciate shorter services. (They also dislike leaving their pets, which the church welcomes only if they're well-behaved.) Understanding the homeless community's needs, desires and fears is vital to the success of SoupMobile Church. And because Timothy has worked closely with this population for 15 years, he's been able to design the church especially for them.

"The key for us, and I think for any church trying to serve the homeless, is to look at it from their perspective, not from what you think church should be, he says. "It's worked for us, but more importantly, it's worked for the homeless population we serve."

—Jessica Hanewinkel  
SoupMobile.org