How God is using a bitter Chicago winter and PGM to draw many to Him

THE PERFECT STORM OF SALVATION

THE SECOND WEEK OF JANUARY witnessed a frigid cold front move down upon the nation, trailing with it buckets of snow. America learned a new phrase—polar vortex. In Chicago, record temperatures were set while nearly two feet of snow descended. For many, however,

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a beautiful event occurred: families were forced indoors and, as a result, united in love more closely. Still, for so many others, those without family or a home to retire to, the storm only brought threats of frostbite and, truthfully, thoughts of possible death. At Pacific Garden Mission, three television networks came to report on what one television crewman called “a national storm affecting so many.” However, even as the television cameras were filming under the roof of PGM, a profound thought rose throughout the mission—namely, each saw how that what the world views as a calamity, our Lord uses as an instrument of opportunity; an instrument that, quite frankly, brought a vast, record-setting multitude within the doors of PGM, where each, warmed and filled, heard the most amazing story ever told—the Gospel message that promises love, hope, and peace, as well as a relationship with a living Savior, Who will never leave or forsake any who call on His name. From among this great number, we are blessed to share two personal stories from those cold, icy days, stories that so richly illustrate the Lord’s hand, His providence, at work within PGM and in the lives of all who find shelter here at the Old Lighthouse.

Thirty-nine year old James Black arrived at PGM under freezing temperatures. Born in Minneapolis, James, at the age of four, was sent to live with his grandparents in Indiana after his father went to prison for the murder of five individuals. Having a learning disability, James struggled and left school at the age of sixteen. Wayward and spiritually lost for many years, James was put out of his grandmother’s home at the age of twenty-seven. James became truly homeless, sporadically living with friends but mostly in shelters. Eventually, he ended up in prison on two separate
Office B worker Kenny Pruitt witnessed to James during the intake, sharing the Gospel message; James accepted Jesus into his heart and also decided to join the Men’s Bible Program and forego his plans to return to Minnesota. As James says, “I realized I needed time to get my life in order and in order with Jesus.” After many days on the Men’s Bible Program, James shares his thoughts: “I am learning a lot now about Jesus and what a life in Him means. How I arrived here still amazes me. There are people here helping me. I’m losing the bad thinking. It’s like I am in school again and actually learning. And, I will be in the GED class here soon.”

Fifty-three year old Larry Coleman, a legally blind man, also came to PGM during the cold spell. He received clothes, a hot shower, warm food, and the Gospel message. As Larry described his situation, he said, “I was cold, freezing, blind, and nowhere to go.” Imagine being legally blind with nowhere to go during a severe winter storm that carries with it record-setting cold. Again, the wonderful, mysterious workings of our Lord: the Lord brought Larry to the Old Lighthouse, where, as with James Black, he was witnessed to during intake in Office B. And like James, Larry, too, accepted Jesus into his heart. Again, the Lord shaped into an opportunity what the world saw as a calamity. Larry, nearly blind and stumbling his way through arctic temperatures, lays bare the cruel reality that he experienced: “I was alone and would have frozen to death had I not found this place.”

For both James Black and Larry Coleman, the difference between a warming center and Pacific Garden Mission is evidenced in eternal measures—a warming center cannot see people come to a life-changing, life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ. At PGM, you, our donors, enabled a

occasions for selling drugs.

Attempting to move from Indiana back to Minnesota, James arrived in Chicago by bus on Saturday, January 5, in the midst of the perfect winter storm of 2014. He was told that due to the weather he would have to wait till Thursday, January 9, to catch a bus to Minnesota. He needed a place to stay, and, having $35 dollars, he hailed a taxi to take him to a shelter; the shelter, though, was full and turned him away. Back at Chicago’s Union Station and now down to only $10, James talked to a cab driver who offered to take him to PGM for free. He accepted the offer and arrived at PGM, where the policy has always been never to turn anyone away. James says, “I was trapped in Chicago in bad weather with nowhere to go. God shut every door but then gave me a free ride to PGM.”

Once inside the Old Lighthouse, James was directed to Office B, where intake occurs for all first-time male guests.
physical warmth for all who sought shelter, as well as providing for a much deeper spiritual warmth as many opened their hearts to the eternal, soul-saving message of our Lord Jesus Christ and the peace given to all who believe on His name. And not to be lost in the great storm of 2014 is the miraculous work of our Lord, how He brought these two and many others to PGM, filled their hearts with His love, and saved their souls.

The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee—Psalm 9:9, 10.

Our January 2014 Graduates

PGM Chaplain Ervin McNeill gave the commencement sermon, a sermon entitled, “The Five Smooth Stones in a Shepherd’s Bag.” Pastor McNeill himself received salvation here at the mission on March 25, 1979. He has served as PGM’s chaplain since 1995. Flossie McNeill, his wife, is the director of PGM’s radio broadcast “Unshackled!”


Investing in Our Future

Carl Montgomery and Renard Green are two recent graduates who are beginning their Biblical studies as a result of being recipients of PGM’s Rexilius Fund, a fund established by Dr. McCarrell’s brother-in-law James Rexilius. This fund goes to those graduating men and woman from our Bible Program who wish to further their Christian education. Should you wish to support this fund, please write Rexilius Fund on your donation.

Male guest ministry worker Carl Montgomery assists overnight guests in the Dayroom.
Far-right: First shift lead security worker Renard Green overlooks the hallways from within the kiosk.
Shelter & Salvation

This winter’s cold wave brought unprecedented numbers of people inside the doors of Pacific Garden Mission. One night alone there were 1,081 people. Men, women, and children huddled together seeking relief from the bitter Chicago winter. It is easy to be overwhelmed at the mass of humanity filling our day rooms, classrooms, hallways, and recently almost every available space in the mission. I think of the story found in Mark 5 where the Bible states in verse 31, “And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?” The disciples were amazed that in the midst of the great crowd, Jesus could be focused upon one person, one individual. Similarly, in the midst of this great population at PGM, there has been one group that has touched my heart, that group being young males.

We have a large and growing number of 18–25 year olds who are just sitting here every day. I talked to Pastor Sampson Green, Director of the Men’s Division, and asked him, What can we do to reach this population? Imagine with me: most 18 year olds are preparing for graduation or preparing for their first year of college or working their first job while learning to shave. Now imagine an 18 year old being homeless, waiting in line for a bed or his next meal, or instead of going off to college, standing in a line going to our clothing room. Pastor Green and Carl Montgomery, a counselor, have taken this population under their care and are meeting with them twice a week, focusing just on them, sharing the Gospel, and discussing life.

Recently two of these young men made professions of faith and decided to join our discipleship program. Just today, I talked to a young man who said that although he was recently released from the county jail, his family does not want him home, so he ended up here. He joined our discipleship program and is rejoicing in the Lord because of his newly found faith in Jesus and the support and love of others here at the mission. The other morning someone saw him mopping the bathroom while he was singing a hymn. Praise God that these young men have some place that cares for and about them.

The sad truth, though, is very real: if we do not reach these young men, someone else will. I am, at this point, reminded of a story. A horrific hurricane, out at sea, occurred, and as a result many starfish washed ashore upon a shoreline in Florida. After the storm cleared, a young boy walked down the shore and began picking up starfish and one-by-one threw them back into the sea. As he did this, a cynical older man yelled out to the boy, “What does it matter? There are so many starfish littering the shore; what does it matter that you throw that one back in?” The boy looked at the starfish in his hand, and as he was throwing it back into the ocean, said, “It matters to this one.” Someone may feel, “What does it matter in a world filled with such violence; what does it matter that masses are huddled into Pacific Garden Mission where the needs are so great?” Well, it matters to the one we are trying to save; indeed, it matters to that one eternally.
Thank you to all who made donations in November and December that brought our cumulative cash flow for this fiscal year to a positive $57,000. However, there are 6 months remaining in the fiscal year which need to be much better than prior years in order for cash flow to remain positive. Thank you for your continued support.

GIVING THOUGHTS—The curtain has gone down on the IRA charitable rollover—at least for the present. We all hope it will rise again soon. However, a donor can still engage in the two-step process of taking a distribution from an IRA and then writing a check to a favorite charity. The donor simply has to be sure that the distribution can be offset by the resulting charitable deduction. The beauty of this is that, if you are over 59 ½ years old, it is available with any qualified retirement plan such as a pension plan, a 401k plan, a profit sharing plan, etc., not just an IRA. Also, there is no limit on the amount of the gift given to a qualified charity.

JANUARY 2014 NUMBERS

1041 Daily average of homeless sleeping overnight.
121 Number of men and women enrolled in Bible Study Program and provided room and board.
82,822 Approximate number of plates of food served.
63,079 Estimated number of items of clothing distributed at PGM or given to other missions.
352 Number of patients treated in free Medical/Dental Clinic.
103 Number of persons who professed faith in Christ!
3,024 Stations broadcasting in 14 languages (Albanian, Arabic, English, Farsi, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish)

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