

Nick Colon  
Christ in the City Reflections

One of the first things I noticed as I walked into Harvard Square for the first time was the disparity between the immense wealth of Harvard and the number of people experiencing homelessness right outside its gates. When hearing about the Catholic Center's Service Saturdays serving the poor, I was instantly drawn in and attended every Service Saturday I could. I soon began to make friends with those on the streets and formed strong relationships with them, providing them with conversation, food when I could, and anything else they might need—above all, though, the conversation the most important.

I first heard about Christ in the City at the FOCUS conference my freshman year. I wasn't terribly aware of the nationwide problem of homelessness, but the CIC missionaries showed us the importance of treating those experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect. The following year at the FOCUS conference I was also drawn into their table, and had incredible conversations with the missionaries. This past year at the FOCUS conference, I made good friends with a missionary, Alexander, who made clear to me the importance of all that Christ in the City does.

This past spring break I spent six days living in community with the Christ in the City missionaries in Denver. Christ in the City is a missionary community centered on personal Catholic formation and service to the poor. They enter the streets of Denver daily making friends with those experiencing homelessness and pointing them in the direction of helpful resources in the Denver area. Above all, though, they provide those experiencing homelessness with basic human dignity in the conversations they have with them and showing them the love of Christ, genuinely "loving them until it hurts," as Mother Theresa would say.

I chose to visit them after an incredible experience making friends with Gary, a veteran who is chronically homeless. He slept on the steps of our Catholic Center, and I would often stop to talk to him. We would talk about everything, ranging from the weather to his tattoos to his wife Whitney's health. Throughout last year I grew closer to Gary and always looked forward to bringing him food from our kitchen. This past summer on July 4<sup>th</sup>, I saw him stumbling down Bow Street past the church. I quickly ran to him, wanting to make sure he was okay. He explained how after one hundred days sober he relapsed. He explained how alone he felt, and how he didn't feel like anyone loved him. I sat with him for about half an hour until he fell asleep, then prayed a Rosary for him on my walk home. Sadly, I haven't seen Gary since.

Ministering to the homeless is not an easy task. When the missionaries meet someone in the street, it's unclear where they will be tomorrow or if they will ever see them again. Though they have a number of strong and sustained relationships, the missionaries face this reality daily; while they might not see their friends for long periods of time, having their motivations be rooted in Christ allows them to minister to them in their spiritual way through prayer.

My experience with Christ in the City opened my eyes to the importance of this ministry and the desire in my heart to love those who feel the least amount of love and to live in community focusing around that common goal of loving others. Coming back on to campus I'm excited to share this love of Christ with the vulnerable population of

Harvard Square's homeless and look forward to creating these relationships that last. Though the disparity between Harvard and those on the streets is still very clear, I'm better equipped to minister to them with Christ at the center of what I do and the intention of loving them until it hurts.