

# Providence Expansion

An Update from Faye

February 18, 2008



"Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?"

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

"Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

"Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard."

*Isaiah 58:5-8*



The Providence Expansion Team.  
Top row (l-r): Joses, Carlos, Jihoon, Jarrod. Bottom row (l-r): Brita, Anna, Faye, Susie, Jen.

This January I had the sweet opportunity to lead (with two of my teammates) a small group of students in a project we termed *Providence Expansion*. Brown students have a really long winter break, and so for the couple of weeks before they started school again, nine of us spent time in Providence, talking with other college students about their spiritual lives, and serving the poor in the city. Brown is geographically and socio-economically separated from the rest of Providence, and so we wanted to give these students the opportunity to think more about the people around them, and to give of themselves for those people.

The project was fantastic. I was really tired going into it, after a whirlwind Christmas break (visiting my family, visiting my boyfriend in Michigan (who you'll hear more about soon!)) and then working hard at our annual northeast student conference the first week of January. It was very encouraging for me to see God's faithfulness to us, especially in light of how little energy we had going into the project!

The most significant part of the project for me, and for most of the students, was the thinking about, praying for, and serving of the poor and homeless in our city. We spent a number of nights studying what the Bible has to say about God's heart for the poor, and investigating what keeps us, personally, from really caring for these people the way God does and would want us to. We spent a couple of days serving in a local homeless shelter, did some snow-shoveling for our neighbors, and took a prayer tour around the city. We didn't know it, but 30% of Providence lives in poverty.

Brita, a freshman from New Hampshire, said that the most significant experience for her was the evening we went out to find dinner with only \$1 in our pockets. We wanted to gain, if possible, a little bit of insight into what it might feel like to not have enough money to live in our comfortable, middle-class lifestyle. Brita (and many of the others of us) ended up sitting on the street and asking passersby for spare change. She said it was incredibly eye-opening for her, because not one person ended up giving her (a cleanly-dressed, nice-looking young woman) any money. Even knowing that it was an exercise, and only actually sitting out for less than half an hour, she felt unbelievably disrespected and devalued.

It is heart-breaking to me to think that this is the experience for thousands of people here (millions across our country, billions in the world). What's even more heart-breaking is to think that, by my own lack of active care for them, I am communicating to the poor around me that they are less valuable as people and less valuable to God. Oh Lord, change my heart!

We are pursuing ways this semester to involve Christian and non-Christian students together in serving the poor around us. Our prayer is that we will honor the Lord, both by caring for people He is deeply committed to, and by taking opportunities to talk about a Savior who came to rescue and heal both the hard-hearted and the physically destitute.

