

**PROJECT HOPE BAGS (2005)**  
*(A nationwide homeless outreach project) [www.hopebags.com](http://www.hopebags.com)*

**The Hope Bag Project** is a non-profit, non-denominational charity created in November 2003 as a service project for the National Catholic Youth Conference in Houston, Texas. Our main program is a unique homeless outreach called Project Hope Bags. This program targets the “cardboard sign” carrying homeless who frequent suburban roadways and panhandle for a living . Many of them live twenty miles or more from the closest shelter. Commuters regularly encounter them at busy stoplights or intersections, but no one seems to know how best to help. Project Hope Bags **teaches people how to help** the homeless by giving them **food, hope and love** in the form of a Hope Bag.

**What is a Hope Bag?** A Hope Bag is a bag containing a meal of non-perishable pop-top cans of meat, fruit and vegetables, plastic ware, water, maps to local shelters, a short caring handwritten note, and a pre-stamped prayer request postcard that can be mailed back to the church. The meals are given to drivers to carry in their cars. When they encounter a panhandler, they can give them the Hope Bag. Since the contents are non-perishable, the bags can be carried indefinitely in people's cars.

**CONTENTS OF A HOPE BAG: (Cost : approximately \$3.00)**

1. A single serve, non-perishable meal of pop-top cans, plastic utensils and napkin
2. Canned fruit juice or bottled water
3. A comprehensive list of local, long term homeless help programs with phone numbers and maps
4. Personalized messages or letters of hope written by concerned youth or adults
5. A self addressed, stamped postcard for patrons (if desired) to mail in information or prayer requests

**Project Hope Bags is a great service project!** Everyone gets involved, it's cheap and simple! Your youth group, church, school or other organization can join the movement and provide useful material and spiritual support to the homeless. And the good news is: **ITS FREE!** ( No fee, no charge, no cost, non-profit!) We will provide your group with all the empty bags, advice and educational materials you will ever need! Mother Teresa had a saying that reads: “If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one!”. Our saying is: “Lets get a hundred people to feed one each!” **Join us** and our **131 partners** in sharing God's love with the homeless!

**The project has three main objectives:**

**To reach out to the homeless with love and material support.** (Many of the homeless live in suburban areas, 20 miles or more from the closest shelter. Like most of us, they choose to live in the safer, low crime suburbs. Most of the suburban homeless rarely visit existing shelters or soup kitchens.)

**To educate the public about the homeless and involve them directly in their aid.** (Suburban commuters regularly pass panhandlers; sometimes they give cash but more often they lock their car doors and look the other way)

**To provide a "low cost", non-denominational service project for youth groups or an affordable alternative to soups kitchens for churches or other organizations.** (I have seen the homeless walk into churches looking for food and leave "empty handed" ! Every church should stock several behind the desk for emergency aid requests.)

**Do's and Don'ts:**

**Please fill your empty bags and distribute them to the needy!**

**Please do not use Hope Bags as a fundraiser for your youth group**

**Please include personalized “love and respect” with each bag**

**Please do not include personal info (last name, phone, or addresses) in letters**

**TEN WAYS TO HELP THE HOMELESS**

**1. Let the Holy Spirit lead you.**

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” John 14:26 “And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that

the Father may be glorified in the Son.”  
John 14:13

**2. Show them respect.**

Even a smile or eye contact can help break down the sense of isolation and worthlessness that sometimes leads to depression and paranoia. The courtesy and respect you share can give someone the hope and strength they need to lift themselves out of a bad situation.

**3. Recognize that the homeless are not all the same.**

The homeless come from all kinds of situations, from battered wives to unemployed men, from alcoholics and drug addicts to the mentally ill and from con artists to scared runaway teens that are on the street for the first time. And let's not forget the children, elderly and veterans. Each is unique, but all are deserving of your love and help.

**4. Learn the facts about the homeless and educate others.**

Learn about the homeless and their problems. Understand who they are and how to help. Help to dispel the myths about homelessness and educate others about the facts. Most homeless people are not drunks, drug abusers, or former mental patients! Most are able and/or willing to work.

**5. Don't forget to care and be generous**

Your money, talents and time can transform people's lives. Give to your local food bank, volunteer at the area shelters; donate clothes, toys, blankets and books. Pray, care, love and teach. Become part of the solution to homelessness and not part of the problem. Above all, give hope!

**6. Avoid giving cash to individuals.**

Cash won't solve the problem. It can be used to buy drugs or alcohol or it can enable someone to ignore the root causes of their homelessness. It is more helpful to give cash to local shelters or support agencies. Instead, give food, love, respect, help, prayer, blankets, bus tokens, or food certificates.

**7. Encourage the homeless to get help.**

Long term help is available. Steer homeless people toward a local rescue mission where there is food, shelter, and other help. Less than six percent of the homeless are that way by choice. Many don't know where to go or how to get there. If you see a homeless person in obvious physical or psychological distress, alert the appropriate officials. Outreach to these individuals is best left to professionals.

**8. Pray for them and share God's love always.**

God loves every homeless person, no matter how hardened and hopeless they may be – and he asks us to love them too. He can heal what we cannot and your prayer can be part of the process. If Jesus were walking the earth today, He would certainly spend time with the homeless. Today, Jesus calls on us to give them the same respect, love and aid that He would.

**9. Take precautions for your own safety.**

In general, the homeless are among the least threatening groups in our society. If anything, they are the victims of crimes, not the perpetrators. But some living on the streets can be criminals or fugitives. Stay in areas where other people can see you and don't take unnecessary chances.

**10. Become an advocate for the homeless.**

Make sure that your state and local governments are aware of and address the needs of the homeless in our area. Encourage local businesses, churches and individuals to get involved in the fight against homelessness. It is estimated that there are over 10,000 homeless men, women and children in Harris County alone!

**VISIT ([www.hopebags.com](http://www.hopebags.com)) FOR INFORMATION AND TO REPORT ON YOUR PROJECT OR EXPERIENCES.**