

1.17.16

What is Midnight Run?

Brotherhood organizes a Midnight Run several times a year, during the coldest months. After running this program for approximately 15 years, we take it for granted that the Temple community knows what we mean when we announce an upcoming Run. We usually include words to the effect of, "We need your help to donate warm clothes, and to sort clothes and make sandwiches on the day of the Run. If anyone is interested in participating, please contact us."

Those who help to prep for the Run on a Saturday afternoon get some "inside information" about what this is all about, and those who actually go on the Run are given "the spiel" before setting out so they have an idea of what to expect. However, if you have never participated in the prep or been on the Run itself, you may have little understanding of what happens. Let's set this straight, because the more you know, the more you may appreciate what is being done and may even want to lend a hand.

Midnight Run www.midnightrun.org is a not-for-profit organization, incorporated in 1989, based in Dobbs Ferry, NY. The Executive Director, Dale Williams, has managed the operations since 1991 and was homeless in NYC for three years. He knows the issues first-hand. From their website, "Midnight Run is dedicated to finding common ground between the housed and the homeless." The intent of a Run is to bring food, clothing, toiletries and blankets to the homeless, but just as importantly, to bring human interaction and conversation. It is not enough to drop off supplies. Midnight Run is engagement on many levels.

A Midnight Run is organized in three parts- the collection of clothes, sorting clothes and making sandwiches on the afternoon of the Run, and going to NYC that same night. It is our hope that young people- often in advance of Bar or Bat Mitzvah but of a wide range of ages- will participate in a Run as a Mitzvah project and/or community service. In those cases, we encourage young people to organize clothing drives in their schools and communities. Other Temple / community members are also encouraged to collect articles of clothing and bring them to the Temple, dropping them in the coat room in a bag marked for Midnight Run.

Appropriate clothing includes blue jeans, sweaters, sweatshirts (hoodies!), winter coats, long sleeve polo shirts, hats, gloves, unopened Jockey-type underwear, thermal underwear and warm socks. Blankets are also very welcome. Large sizes and dark colors are most useful, for layering, for blending in to surroundings, and to hide dirt. Dress clothing and shoes, button-down shirts, cardigan sweaters, blazers and loud colors are not particularly useful, and we usually spend a fair amount of time sorting these out of the collections and bringing them to Goodwill. Thankfully, there are many less women than men on the street so we only take a limited amount of women's clothing. The point is, "clearing closets" for the intent of giving to Midnight Run should be done with the appropriate clothing list in mind.

The week of a Run, we need meatloaves that can be brought to the Temple to be placed in a freezer, or refrigerator if on Thursday or Friday. It is most helpful to have these on hand by Friday so that we know how much food we have and/or need to buy to supplement. If meatloaves are brought on Saturday, while welcome, it doesn't help us plan.

On the day of the Run, with enough helpers, we meet for approximately two hours to sort clothing, put toiletries in bags (that are usually provided by Midnight Run organization), make sandwiches and pack

them with juice, cookies and a fruit, and load the van, which is lent to us by Midnight Run. We also load a vehicle of an adult who will travel with the van in convoy, as we try to bring as many items (and people) with us as possible. It is unwieldy to make stops in NY with more than two vehicles. Sorting entails putting the different types of clothing in groups, and labeling each article of clothing with the size in a visible spot so that, in the packed van in the middle of the night, it is easy to see what is on hand when we serve the people on the street.

To the uninitiated, one of the most surprising aspects of collecting and sorting clothing is that it really matters about the sizes and types of clothing, the materials they are made of, the color and the condition. Many people who have not been on a Run think that, "any item of clothing is better than nothing." The truth is, people on the street are in many ways just like you and me, only they fell on hard times. They have preferences as to what they want to wear, what fits, whether a material may irritate their skin, etc. They are carrying their belongings on their backs, in bags and in their sleeping quarters-boxes on the street- and their belongings have to work well for them.

The participants for the Run meet at 8:15pm at the Temple to finish loading the van, including a large container of hot water to be used for Cup-o-Soup, and to get the rundown of what to expect during the night. We are bringing food, clothing, and engagement to the people on the street. The day or two before the Run, Midnight Run organization will have provided our group leader with an itinerary for the night. They have canvassed the city, verifying where people are sleeping, and they let each group going on a Run know where they should stop. There are often 6-7 other groups from different churches, synagogues or other community outreach organizations going on a Run on a given Saturday night, and Midnight Run orchestrates all these groups. We will have a list of approximately 5 stops to make, with a list of several more in case we have clothing or food left over.

When we make a stop, we announce ourselves to the people gathered in that location on the street, who are very aware of Midnight Run and looking forward to our visit. We get into service mode as our "customers" approach the van. We find out what each person needs and we try our best to get the closest item to what they asked for. "Would you like a sandwich? Cup-o-Soup? Bottle of water? Do you need toiletries? A coat? Pair of jeans? Can you use a blanket? We'll be told they need a 34" waist, or a large coat, a hoodie, etc. One of the adults will see if there is anyone in a box who might not have heard that we were there, and ask gently if we can bring something to them. We strike a balance between offering something to that person vs. disturbing them. One of the adults looks around the area for someone who might have missed our announcement. Young people work in pairs, giving out items and having conversations, as do the adults. We don't give money and don't take photos. No one in our group is asked to do more than they feel comfortable doing. We are a variety store on wheels, and we want to know something about the people we are serving. The people we meet are universally greatly appreciative of what we are doing. One thing many of us find incredibly moving is when asking someone if they need another item of clothing, they say, "no, I'm fine." It resets your attitude about what is important.

Our time in NYC goes from approximately 9:30pm to 1-2am, depending on how many people we serve and how long the supplies last. A stop might have 2-3 people, or 15 or more. Midnight Run indicates on their itinerary if the stop is expected to be small, medium or large, but it's not always as expected. We get back to Croton at about 2-3am. We're tired, but thankful that we could help in some small way to

support people who are much less fortunate than ourselves. We are grateful that we have warm beds to snuggle into once we get home.

Hopefully you understand much more about Midnight Run because of this article. Hopefully you will join us, either to collect clothing, sort, make sandwiches, or go on a Run. It might be one of the most moving experiences of your life.

Steve Samuels