

Serving at the Iditarod through Alaska Missions: Meeting needs, to break down walls in order to share the gospel

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, a group of ten adults, eight from First Baptist Huntsville and two family members from Mississippi, left for a trip to the remote town of Nome, AK to serve with Brenda Crim, founder of Alaska Missions and Retreats (AKMR). The eight members included Talley Fanning, Mark and Angela Seanor, Mark Russell, Nancy Talley, Jayne Russell, Jeff Vaughn, and Holly Canup.

Our mission purpose was two-fold. First, we assisted Brenda, an independent missionary, that has supplied the volunteer staff to the Iditarod Trail Commission (ITC) for the last 19 years. Our group joined with 80 other volunteers from AKMR, to serve the ITC at the finish line of The Last Great Race. We served in such capacities as security at the finish line, front desk attendants, dog lot care and security, transportation help, office custodians, and any job that was needed by the ITC. We served with a generous spirit, smile, and love of Jesus, something that is not seen often in the remote areas of Alaska.

Our second purpose was to staff and serve a concession stand at the Village Basketball Tournament benefiting a local domestic violence shelter, host a kids camp, and assist the local police in safety checks at night. Sexual abuse and alcoholism are two of the largest problems seen in the villages and towns with virtually 100% abuse statistics. Brenda has built relationships in the villages through her work at the tournament and lives by her mission statement and strategy of "Meeting needs, to break down walls in order to share the gospel." One example of this was a native lady, Amelia, who felt comfortable enough to seek out people to pray with and for her daughter who had been med-flighted hours earlier to Anchorage. Amelia, who had been living far from God, knew that she could trust Brenda and her crew and sought us out. We gathered around her and prayed for her family.

We won't see the fruit of our efforts most likely, but Brenda will be back to keep watering the seeds that were planted. Going to Nome during the Iditarod and Basketball tournament gives AKMR volunteers the advantage of getting to interact with a larger number of villagers so that Brenda can continue to build trust and relationships. From the work in Nome, Brenda has been able to expand her ministry to the smaller, remote villages, where she is able share the gospel. In future trips to Nome, FBC will play an even larger role as we have developed relationships and trust with other leaders, volunteers and villagers.

Holly Canup