



Your twice-a-month e-newsletter from Citygate Network

Useful news and information for members

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Happy New Year from Citygate Network! We wish wonderful surprises from God's hand as you do His work in 2020.

This is the first issue of *Street Smart* for the year. In the past, we have skipped the first blast in January and only posted a New Year's greeting. But for 2020, because so much is happening, we'll do an abbreviated edition of this popular publication and cover some things that can't wait until the middle of the month. A complete version of *Street Smart* will resume on schedule then.

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Ashmen Represents Citygate Network at White House Meeting

Just a few days before Christmas, Citygate Network President John Ashmen attended a bipartisan gathering in Washington on Transforming Mental Health Treatment to Combat Homelessness, Violence, and Substance Abuse. Heavy hitters were at the podium and on the panels: HHS Secretary Alex Azar, HUD Secretary Ben Carson, Drug Czar Jim Carroll, Dr. Drew Pinsky, Assistant to the President Kellyanne Conway, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Katie Sullivan, and others. C-SPAN carried it live. About midway through, President Trump walked over from the Oval Office and made a surprise appearance to thank the group for its work. At the center of the discussion was the premise that for the past several decades, civil rights have outweighed the need for helpful treatment, and that has to change if we are going to see things change on our streets. John reported that some recent policy changes are starting to make a real difference in this area. More information will follow in Citygate Network publications.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar was the opening speaker. If you are especially interested in this topic, this [transcript](#) of his remarks will give you a flavor of the event.

John invited members Brandon Thomas from **Winchester Rescue Mission** (Winchester, Virginia) and Justin Behrens from **Keystone Rescue Mission** (Scranton, Pennsylvania) to join him. Brandon is a strong advocate for mental health issues and Justin is deeply involved in government relations. During the six-hour event, John also got to spend time with former Citygate Network Director of Public Relations Nicole Daniels Frazier, now working in the White House as Special Assistant to the President in the Department of Public Liaison.

Citygate Network Welcomes New Director of Communications

The new year brings fresh starts on many fronts, and Citygate Network is pleased to introduce Marvin Harrell, who will join our Colorado Springs staff in mid-January as the new Director of Communications. With a background in writing, editing, web development, and graphic design, he comes to us from The Christian & Missionary Alliance where he most recently served as Web Manager. At Citygate Network, he will oversee paper and ink publications (e.g., *Instigate*), electronic publications (e.g., *Street Smart*), social media, website, and public relations. You'll have a chance to "meet" him online and over the phone during the next several months.

The Full Conference Brochure Is Now Online and in Print

The official 16-page 2020 Annual Conference and Exposition brochure is available [here](#) and will soon be on your desk if you get *Instigate* magazine. It provides a complete schedule, speaker info—we've added several—and seminar titles. The staff feels this is one of the best programs we've ever put together. Hopefully you're making plans to be with us in the Alamo City this coming May.



Congress Repeals 'Church Parking Tax'

Democrat and Republican leaders agreed to update tax codes to include a repeal of the "parking lot tax" that came out in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. The repeal was part of appropriations bills sponsored by Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ). It was originally written to increase taxes through what lawmakers deemed a fringe benefit for employees of churches and ministries with parking lots. President Trump signed the [repeal](#) into law on December 20, 2019. Rescue missions and similar ministries had been affected, but the repeal is actually retroactive. The IRS will provide instructions for claiming a refund on taxes paid for the last two years when the "parking lot tax" was in effect.

Canadian Community Brings Christmas to Stranded Passengers

According to a CTV News [article](#), a small community in Newfoundland came together to feed 80 West-Jet passengers whose Christmas Day plans fell victim to weather delays after leaving Toronto. Stranded in Deer Lake with all restaurants and stores closed for the holiday, a Salvation Army major put the word out on social media, and within an hour, the tiny community responded by bringing a Christmas feast potluck to the hungry travelers temporarily sheltered at the Holiday Inn.

Three Virginia Churches Collaborate to Pay Off School Meal Debts

The Washington Post published an [article](#) about three Virginia pastors who pooled their church resources to pay off several local schools' meal program debts. According to the story, school meal debt issues exist in school districts across the country. A recent survey revealed that 75 percent of school districts nationwide have unpaid meal charges, averaging about \$2,500 per district, mostly due to the number of food-insecure families that don't quite qualify for federal aid but are unable to cover costs for their children to eat breakfast or lunch at school. Not a lot of people know about this all-too common debt, but the generosity of this trio of churches has garnered a lot of attention via social media and inspired others to make similar contributions. *Consider: When gracious minds collaborate to come up with creative solutions to issues that often slip through the cracks, everybody wins.*

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The Association of Christian Thrift Stores (ACTS) will hold its annual January workshop January 19–22, 2020, in Pontiac, Michigan. For more details and to register for both the workshop and hotel, visit www.actsworld.com.

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New Year Perspective

The end of one year and beginning of another can trap us in a place of regret or a state of anxiety. While valuable insight and inspiration can come from both examining the past and considering the future, we need to avoid allowing either perspective to paralyze our productivity or impede our obedience.

Learning from the past plays an important role in the maturity process; our failures and successes should help us make appropriate adjustments going forward. But too much time spent resting on the laurels of previous accomplishments or, alternatively, beating ourselves up for mistakes, can detract from growth and progress. Athletes know they can't make a strong push for the finish if their focus remains over their shoulder.

At the same time, if we allow ourselves to get caught up in controlling everything according to our own plans or ambitions, we tend to take over the lead and relegate God to the sidelines. We begin to think everything relies on our own strength or ability, and stress about making things happen the way we envision in order to gloriously reach our objectives.

Perhaps in 2020, we can gratefully recognize being well on the way, while keeping our eyes on Jesus beckoning us onward (Philippians 3:12), as he makes a pathway through the wilderness and rivers in the wasteland (Isaiah 43:19).

Philippians 3:12-14 (MSG)

I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Isaiah 43:19 (NLT)

*For I am about to do something new.
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?
I will make a pathway through the wilderness.
I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.*

Written by Alice Gifford, Citygate Network

To contribute: If you would like to write a devotional thought for StreetLight, please make it about 200 words and include at least one Bible verse or passage, and submit via [email](#).

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