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For Immediate Release

Homeless, Poor and Lonely Invited to Great Thanksgiving Banquet

Nov 11 at 8:15 am Co-hosts Rep. Allan Bense and David Coley Kick-off the Holiday Season at Panama City Rescue Mission as Part of National Celebration

November 11, 2004 -- It's never good to spend Thanksgiving alone. America's Rescue Missions are inviting homeless, poor and lonely people to a traditional holiday dinner. An estimated half-million will respond. We've got a really big table.

The sixth annual Great Thanksgiving Banquet will take place at four different locations on November 25th and 600 needy men, women and children will enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. Nationwide, more than 500,000 meals will be offered by over 275 rescue missions, making it one of the largest coordinated efforts to provide holiday meals to people in need. The ministries involved, including Panama City Rescue Mission, are all members of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions (AGRM), organizers of the event.

The national event will kick-off in New York City Rescue Mission, the nation's oldest Rescue Mission, on Monday November 22nd. In Panama City, Co-Hosts Rep. Allen Bense and David Coley will help Panama City celebrate from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursday November 25th.

Faith Christian Family Church, the Boys and Girls Club and The Rock have joined the Mission to increase the number of people they are able to serve and to highlight their cooperative efforts to serve the greater Bay County area.

"Traditionally, we serve more people at Thanksgiving than at any other meals of the year," Thurman

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Chambers, Executive Director of Panama City Rescue Mission said, “But this event is bigger than our community and our mission. The Great Thanksgiving Banquet is a table stretching from coast to coast where the most vulnerable citizens of the community are the welcome guests.”

“Homeless people are lonely people,” said Chambers. “Our goal is to provide a family atmosphere to homeless and hurting people across Bay County.”

Chambers says the meal is important but so are human kindness, personal warmth and fellowship. He indicated that people in need are often ignored by a majority of the community, so a bountiful meal and words of kindness are things for which they can be truly thankful.

“To help provide this environment, we’re even including special Thanksgiving greeting cards at each table that our donors have signed and returned along with their Thanksgiving gifts,” Amanda Harris, Director of Development, said.

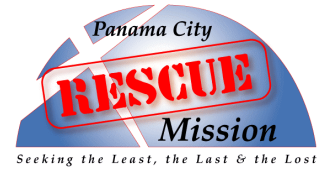
For those unable to make it to one of the four locations, meals can be delivered. Harris says anyone interested in a home delivered meal should call the Mission before November 22nd.

For most of America’s homeless, this will be the first Thanksgiving spent of the street, according to a nationwide survey of 20,000 homeless men, women and children conducted by the AGRM. The study suggests revealed that two-thirds of those served will have been on the streets less than a year.

Locally, the snapshot survey indicated that 16 percent were women and 11 percent of those served were individuals or families with children. Nationally, families make up the fastest growing homeless population, up by 17 percent from 2001 to 2003.

Last year, Panama City Rescue Mission provided more than 83,000 meals, 20,000 nights of shelter, and 17,000 chapel services to homeless and hurting men, women and children. Getting people to come through the doors is crucial, said Chambers.

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“When they are at the mission, we can help them see what the Mission has to offer and help them make a positive change in their life,” Harris said. “At Thanksgiving, more people are reminded that we feed the body, but we also care for the mind and spirit of people in need.”

Panama City Rescue Mission is a member of the AGRM, an association of 290 Rescue missions across North America. Founded in 1913, Association members provide emergency food and shelter, youth and family services, rehabilitation programs for the addicted, education and job training programs and assistance to the elderly poor and at-risk youth.

For more information about Panama City Rescue Mission and locations free of holiday meals, please call 769-0783 or visit www.pcrmission.org.
