

Michelle Santiago

Citigate Network is the umbrella of over 300 organizations that in most major cities, serve as one of the largest North American networks that serve as faith-based crisis and transformational centers. Citigate serves the hungry, the homeless, the abused, and the addicted in hopes to move them from suffering to flourishing. They are able to do this by connecting churches and ministries to education, training, resources, guidance, and representation offered through Citigate. John Ashmen, President and CEO of Citygate Network, discussed there are four ways attempted by most to assist the homeless and the addicted: humanitarian aid, disaster relief, community development, and life transformation. While each level of support is needed, such as providing disaster relief after Hurricane Sandy, Citigate focuses on life transformation. They believe that if we are able to transform someone's life, from the inside to outwards, we are able to create long lasting and life altering change.

Dating back to 1906, formally called Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, Citigate continues its emphasis as a rescue mission. In their strategy, they describe transformation using 8 words: saved, sober, stable, schooled, skilled, secure, settled, and serving. These 8 "S" words aim to break bad and destructive habits as well as prevent individuals from making bad decisions that would ultimately lead them to poor conditions. Citigate focuses on gospel-centered transformation. Faith is not only the foundation but is the center of the transformative work that continues through the connections and resources provided by Citigate. They believe that, "Spiritual regeneration—entering into a relationship with God through His son, Jesus Christ—is a key to success. We believe that real transformation in a person is possible because the Bible teaches that life comes with a 'Reset button'"(Citigate). It is evident that this network covers a multitude of ministries and churches that have the desire to serve those in need in their own communities.

What is remarkable about the work being done in Citigate is the balance between maintaining Christ at the center of the network, while seeing the results of its members. It is not too often we see transformation outside of the church happen. My response to some of the videos that were played in Ashmen's presentation left me wondering, " How can more of that happen?

How can that happen everywhere?”. Benefits to the individual are many in this network. For example, while many can provide a meal or even groceries for the month to someone in need, once that meal is done or the bag of groceries becomes empty, there is nothing left. We can even consider what good is a bag of groceries to someone who has nowhere to cook it or nowhere to store it. How long-term is it for us to provide resources to someone still struggling with addictions or poor habits that would abandon those resources over time? While hearing the testimonies of those who have gone through rescue missions, all I could think about is how true transformation comes through Christ and if we want to see change in our communities, we must know that it is not in our strengths nor is it in all the provisions in the world. A network committed to transformation is what will make long term well being.

Citigate is also beneficial on a larger scale. That is to say that not only does this network help individuals, it also serves as a resource to equip churches and ministries to better be the church. I think that while church is supposed to be a place of transformation, it is undeniable that it is often hard to accomplish. Where the focus is usually to promote transformation inside the church building, Citygate serves as an umbrella for churches and ministries that desire transformation in their communities. While using Scripture, Citigate offers education on information that churches aren't often aware of. They provide not only spiritual information and guidance, but rather are knowledgeable and can provide education. It is one thing to have a passion and heart for the community, it's another thing to be equipped to serve the community. It would be a disservice to not be well informed or educated in how to serve, the laws and restrictions, or even just the needs that exists within the community. In a previous class, we discussed the young lords, who were a Puertorican activist group in New York. They demanded the church take action to serve the community however the church needs to know how.

While I believe in the mission and vision of Citigate, I wonder if it has its limitations due to its structure. For those who follow the Christian faith, this network of programs sounds amazing and successful, however it may be a limitation to those of a different faith. One of their values listed in their website states that they are guided by scripture and follow God's mandates for life. While this network may not be able to be an option for everyone, I believe that after

hearing the presentation and going through their website, I personally believe that Citigate is of huge importance to thousands of churches and ministries that have the heart to serve and need the guidance of a network such as this to offer the best support possible.

## References

*About*. Citygate Network. (n.d.). Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.citygatenetwork.org/agrm/About.asp>