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-A.J. Walker of Reaching Truckers for Christ



Ministry on Wheels

**High gas prices. Holiday travel. Need relief?
One traveling preacher offers solace for long-haul truckers.**

The Reverend A.J. Walker drives a 34-foot motor home down Interstate 95 from Hartland, Maine to the former Howell’s Auto-Truck Stop, just off Route One in Kittery, near the New Hampshire border. In the predawn light, the headlights of his potential followers flicker across the median. Fifty-three footers. Box trailers. Reefers. Lumber trucks. Oil trucks.

“They’re a forgotten lot,” he says.

Walker, 68 and clean-shaven, wears a plaid shirt and blue trousers. In the cabin of his RV, Sinatra plays on satellite radio. He and his wife don’t own a CB, and to truck drivers who modulate across Channel 19, they might appear to be just another pair of aging travelers in Vacationland who have got their “ears” off.

A desk in the their motor home is piled with brochures, Christian country gospel CDs, a cassette tape about conversion, and a card from a truck stop ministry in Georgia that describes similarities between Jesus and truckers. It reads, “He would have driven an 18-wheeler.”

Reaching Truckers for Christ is one of the last mobile ministries of its kind in the country and the only one in Maine. It’s a six-wheeled ministry devoted to truck drivers. The Walkers’ motor home doubles as a chapel.

“People, they have got to realize that an 18-wheeler can’t go into a normal churchyard,” A.J. says. “They’re pretty much tied to the truck stops. We figured if the trucker can’t go to church, let’s take the church to the truck driver.”



The Walkers' "chapel" sits next to the bathroom and shower area. Drivers arrive at the truck stop at all hours of the day. The dusty parking lot teems with idling vans and reefers. A jake brake squeals and air brakes release. Truckers come for some "go juice" and another 200 gallons of diesel. On average, 3,500 trucks pass into the state on Interstate 95 every day, according to 2004 Maine Department of Transportation statistics.

"This chapel's like a self-service gas station," Walker says.

The only problem? Few choose to fuel up on God.

On Thursday morning, a long-hauler out of Indianapolis knocks on the motor home door. Anthony Miller has never heard of the Walkers' little red and white chapel. He doesn't get home to his parish much, and when he's on the road, he's on the clock.

"I'm Anthony," he says. "Some call me Tony. But right now, they're calling me late."

He laughs nervously. He takes off his J.B. Hunt hat. His hands shake. A.J. Walker asks to say a short prayer. The two look down at the carpeted floor.

"Lord Jesus, I pray for Anthony today. We just ask that you be with him in a special way. And, Father, we just ask to give him a safe ride and keep him between the gutters and just go before him in a special way. We just ask now that you put an angel under every wheel and two angels on the hands that guide that steering wheel. Give him a safe ride and bring us back to him safely. In Jesus's name we pray."

The door closes shut behind Tony.

Most truck drivers log at least 100,000 miles a year. Federal regulations limit a driver's day to 14 hours driving and eight to ten hours sleeping in their bunks, not relaxing in the truck stops. Every hour is charted in a logbook.

Walker keeps a logbook, too. In one week, he saw a born-again Christian driver who hauls liquefied natural gas. He had coffee with another born-again, said a prayer for Janet, whose boyfriend is an alcoholic, met with a toll collector from New Hampshire who had heard about the chapel from a different driver, and prayed with another man who had come from Cape Cod to see his brother, a cashier at the truck stop.

Tomorrow the Walkers head back to Hartland for a week off before a scheduled stop at Dysart's Truck Stop in Hermon, the largest in the state.

"We do an awful lot of counseling with the drivers," Linda says. "A lot of them are really strung out or have had a hard day or perhaps are going through a divorce or their child is sick and they need just to cry sometimes and have someone pray with them."

Last year, one driver received divorce papers via satellite fax in his truck. The Walkers didn't preach to him about marriage or modern technology. Instead, they saw a man in need of help. A.J. called the company, which had required that the driver finish his delivery to New Jersey, and said the trucker needed a break. The company told him to forget it.

"He had 92,000 pounds of steel on his truck," A.J. says, "and he wasn't fit to drive. We haven't see this man since. We often wonder if he made it all the way back."

Before Walker ministered to truckers, he brought the Lord Jesus to lumberjacks in a mission called Christ for Lumberjacks. He worked with French Canadian loggers in Montreal. The woods were his first field mission after bible college.

Walker turned to religion late, at 28. Before he found the Lord, he worked in quality control in New Jersey, up to 90 hours a week. Then one night he fell asleep at the wheel, and hit a bridge at 50 mph. Doctors said he wasn't going to make it.

"I like to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ because that's what turned my life around," he says. "That's what saved our marriage. But you can't force this on anybody. You sow it out in love. You give it out in love. What they want to do with it on the road somewhere, that's up to them. I can't do anything. Because all I do is pass it out." ✨

FACING PAGE: REVEREND A.J. WALKER READS THE BIBLE IN HIS MOTOR HOME. HE AND HIS WIFE MINISTER TO LONG-HAUL TRUCKERS AT VARIOUS TRUCK STOPS IN MAINE.

