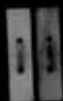




# Poverello News



April 2009 (559) 498-6988  
[www.poverellohouse.org](http://www.poverellohouse.org)



Easter is the big day on the Christian calendar. Christmas is definitely more fun, with all the presents, the Christmas story, and thinking about a cute little baby Jesus. Easter, on the other hand, is associated with Christ being tried, tortured, mocked and crucified. Even though Easter week finishes by celebrating the Resurrection, I've found it all little depressing over the last few years. I hope it's not heresy to admit

this, but I can't seem to emotionally separate the blood and suffering from the glory. I should be celebrating; instead, I'm mired in the horror of the Passion.

I think that it has to do with life experience. If you live long enough, eventually, even for an optimist like me, life will kick you hard in the gut, then stomp you while you're down. I've seen it happen to too many people, and, on occasion, it's happened to me. There are some blows from which you never entirely recover.

Additionally, things have changed dramatically for many of us over the past fifty or so years. Americans had become used to the idea that life was always going to get better, because for so many, it truly did. At least, it got better materially: from a historical perspective, the average lower- to middle-class American enjoys vastly more comfort, better health, and greater security than royalty ever did in past centuries. However, many would argue that as we've become richer, we've become more spiritually impoverished, and developed unrealistic expectations. With the economic downturn, reality has crashed into those expectations, full-speed and head-on.

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A verse in the Proverbs says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” I guess that means that when you expect something good and it doesn’t happen, or something bad happens instead, it’s tremendously dispiriting. Which brings me to my point.

Our expectations as Americans, and my expectations as a comfortable senior citizen, are not realistic. We always want it to be Christmas. We don’t want to go through Easter week in order to get to Easter Sunday. So often, we’re not only dismayed, but also surprised when life becomes difficult, forgetting that the rain comes down on the just and the unjust with equal wetness.

Many homeless people I’ve met have a very different attitude. A lot of them have had the rug pulled out from under them so many times that they don’t expect much. When you do something small for such a person, such as spending a little extra time talking to him, giving him a good meal, or even something so basic as offering a shower and a shave, he tends to be extremely grateful. It’s as if you are surprising him by showing a tiny little kindness.

It would be nice to be able to say that all homeless people were like this, but the truth is, people are people, and some on the streets have the same sense of entitlement as a trust-fund socialite. However, life at the bottom does tend to make many people understand and accept suffering, perhaps better than those who are habituated to luxury.

My faith has changed over the years, tempered by bitterness and desolation at my losses in life, but also by thirty-six years of serving the homeless in Fresno. I’m not the excited, enthusiastic convert that I was in my early twenties. Now, more often than not, I find that faith consists of trudging along, doing what I know is right, even when my heart isn’t in it. These days, I’m fond of Jesus’ parable about the two sons: one refused to do his father’s bidding, but then felt guilty and later did his duty. The other glibly said he’d be glad to do what Dad wanted, but blew it off and forgot about it. At this stage of my life, I’m hoping that God looks at the fact that I’m doggedly showing up, even if it’s sometimes with a weariness that betrays a battered, but persevering, faith. In that sense, I find a strange comfort in the pain and confusion Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. I heard a preacher once say, “It’s Friday; but Sunday’s coming!” My response to that is, “Yeah, but you gotta get through that Friday first!”

*Mike*

# Avoiding Truth

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, denial is a name for "...a psychological defense mechanism in which confrontation with a personal problem or reality is avoided by denying the existence of the problem or reality." A "defense mechanism" is a way of limiting overwhelming emotional stress or pain.

Denial can help someone cope with devastating anguish. For example, many victims of physical abuse consistently lie to themselves and others about the extent of their injuries, minimizing their distress, because they don't want to face the ugly fact that someone they love is hurting them; alcoholics delude themselves about the destruction caused by their drinking, because facing their problem would mean having to quit using alcohol. In both of these cases, denial steps in to justify behavior or relationships that the person isn't ready to give up.

Sometimes, whole nations can be in denial. In the old Soviet Union, citizens became accustomed to living in an Orwellian denial of political realities, because to express discontent could lead to prison or death. After World War II ended, citizens of Nazi Germany had to face the horrific reality of the Holocaust, which many refused to acknowledge while it was taking place.

It's important to note that denial is not a conscious phenomenon. The alcoholic doesn't see that his excuses for drinking are ludicrous; the abuse victim truly believes that if she just behaves better, she won't get beaten again. In fact, most of us practice denial to a lesser extent, although we too are unaware of it. We will react with disbelief if we are confronted with a deadly disease, even pretending that everything is fine. We accept it gradually, because we are psychologically unprepared for it at first. The same goes for the death of someone close: we are first shocked, but we often quickly retreat into some form of denial, just to get through the days and weeks ahead. It takes time to come to terms with unpleasant facts.

Poverty and homelessness are realities that many of us deny on a daily basis. Wealth and development enhance our tendency to deny the existence of deprivation in our midst. Commuters travel on freeways that pass over impoverished areas, obscuring the poor and homeless from consciousness. Suburban sprawl isolates citizens in gated commu-

nities, ensuring that they experience only the better parts of town. We've talked to people who have lived in Fresno most of their lives, yet had never been downtown.

There are others who practice a different kind of denial with regard to homelessness. These are the people, sometimes advocates for the poor, who attribute impersonal forces to the creation of homelessness, such as failure of government intervention, the market economy, or the structure of society. They refuse to see, even in the face of mounting evidence, that most of the homeless are addicted, mentally ill, or both. The solutions they propose, such as providing monetary entitlements without addressing addiction or psychological problems, do nothing to address the intractable problems presented by compulsive drug use and disabling mental imbalances.

Most therapists would say that denial becomes a problem when it acts as a barrier, rather than a buffer, to truth. Thus, the alcoholic who refuses to see the consequences of his drinking will eventually die miserably. The abuse victim who denies the obvious threat and keeps going back to her abuser flirts with her own destruction.

Denying the reality of homelessness also has ramifications. This is true whether the denial takes the form of refusing to acknowledge the existence of people on the streets, or ideological stubbornness that advocates unrealistic and costly utopian solutions. Social problems are exacerbated by unconscious neglect or wrongheaded approaches, and people suffer, or sometimes die, when social problems worsen.

At Poverello House, we constantly pray for the ability to see the homeless problem for what it is, the wisdom to address it in an efficacious manner, and the humility to admit when we're heading in the wrong direction. Over the years, we've seen much of what works and what doesn't, and we strive to use our resources in the best manner possible to relieve the very real pain of homeless men, women and children.



## A Couple of Great Parties

Last Valentine's Day, employees of Sebastian Corporation, a telephone company in Kerman, hosted a wonderful party for families at Poverello House. Besides providing pizza, crafts, and cookies, to children and their parents, employees also did manicures for moms who attended, under the watchful supervision of a licensed manicurist.

Sebastian encourages its employees to get involved serving the community, and we were fortunate to have been selected as a focal point for their efforts. We are grateful to the employees for all of their work and to the company for sponsoring this great event.

Speaking of parties, Amici Del Poverello Guild will be hosting an Easter party on April 4, 2009. The event will include face painting, Easter baskets, crafts, and a visit from the Easter Bunny. This is an annual event, one of many that the Amici Guild does to make the holidays more cheerful for the homeless.

Amici welcomes people wanting to get involved with helping Poverello House. If you would like more information about this supportive and fun group, please call Carol Maul at 229-7709.



*Above: Children make edible crafts at Valentine party given by Sebastian Corporation. Below: A mother gets some TLC for her nails at Valentine's Day party*



# A Hunka Hunka Great Ol' Time

Elvis lives! At least, he lives for a little while on May 9, 2009, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Grand Occasions, 4584 W. Jacqueline in Fresno. Once again, Amici Del Poverello Guild is hosting THE FABULOUS Jeremy Pearce as he struts his stuff and channels The King. You won't want to miss the show, the luncheon, and the chance to win prizes! Tickets are \$25, and all proceeds go toward the Poverello House mission. We are grateful to the Guild, who puts the event together each year, and to Wells Fargo Bank, who underwrote this year's show. For ticket information, please call Carol Maul at 229-7709. Call soon, because tickets go fast!



## *Wish List*

Hams \* Coffee \* Olive oil  
Disposable razors \* Deodorant  
Business envelopes (size 10)  
Tennis shoes \* Men's underwear \* Jeans

*Remember, we now take credit card donations. Please see the enclosed envelope for instructions.*

*To donate online, visit our website at [www.poverellohouse.org](http://www.poverellohouse.org)*

## Poverello House

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### RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**Who Are We?** A nonprofit, nondenominational organization that believes in the dignity of every human being. Our mission is to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way, to feed the hungry, offer focused rehabilitation programs, temporary shelter, medical, dental and other basic services to the poor, the homeless, and the disadvantaged unconditionally, without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex or disability, through Providential and community support. We have been operating since 1973 and are governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of local volunteer business men and women.

**Future Goals?** To provide additional facilities for increased services.

**How Are We Funded?** Primarily through private donations from individuals, churches, businesses, and community organizations; and through United Way. Rules for acceptance and participation in the programs of Poverello House are the same for everyone, without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.



United Way of Fresno County  
Member Organization