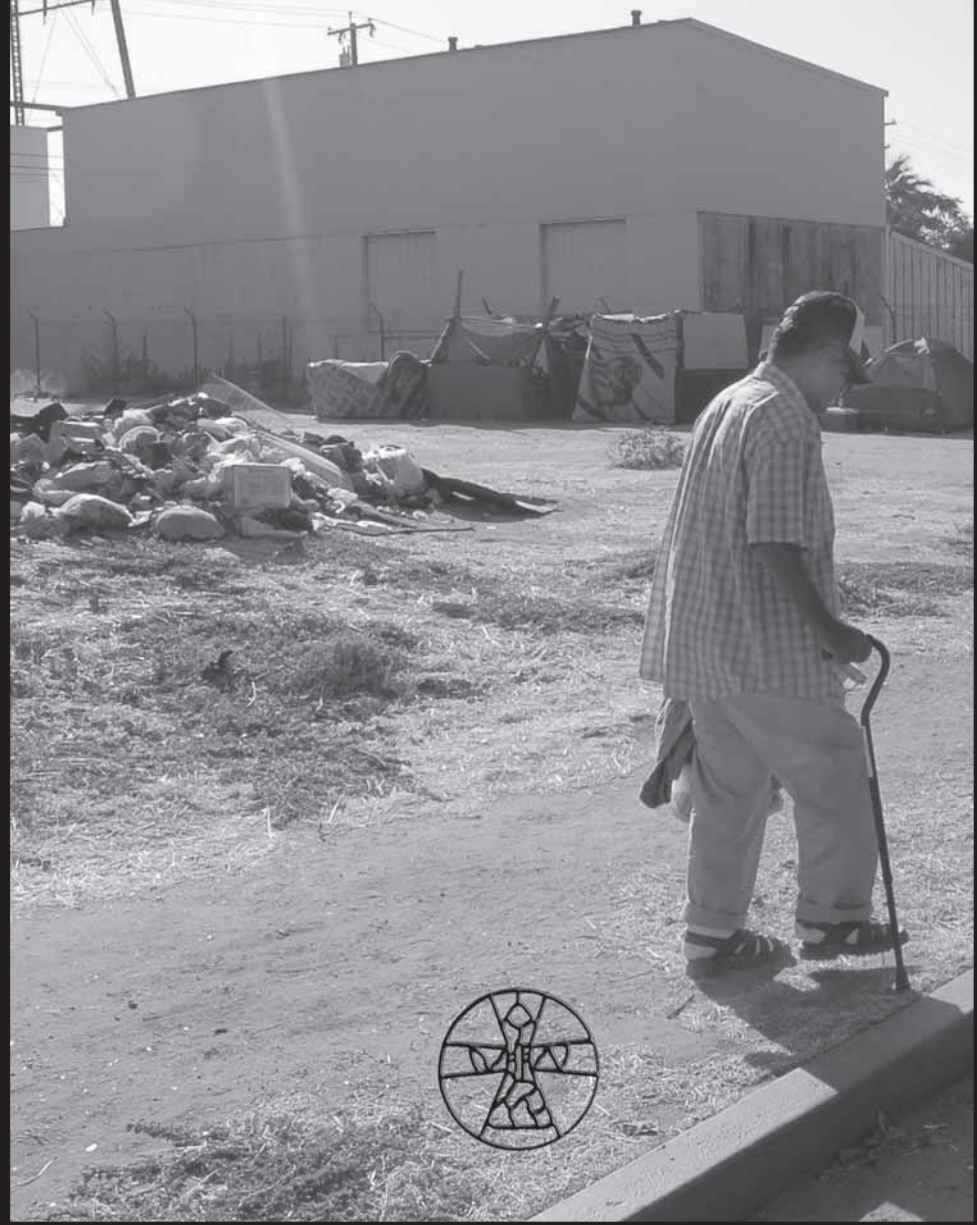


Poverello News

May 2010

(559) 498-6988

www.poverellohouse.org





About fifteen years ago, I took a wrong step on some stairs and tore up my knee pretty badly. I had surgery, and had to have the knee immobilized for several weeks. When the cast came off, I couldn't bend it. It took months of very painful physical therapy to regain motion.

I learned that if I don't use a limb for a long time, it atrophies, stiffens, and becomes useless.

Regaining use of it always involves effort and pain. The longer it's immobilized, the more difficult it will be to restore its functioning. I mention the above incident because I think it's a good metaphor for situations I've seen here at Poverello House.

Because I've worked around street people for the better part of my adult life, it's second nature for me to understand the issues surrounding homelessness. Maybe that's why I'm always surprised when someone from the community asks me, "Why don't those bums just get jobs?" From his perspective, the question is logical and fair. From my perspective, it betrays a lack of familiarity with the problem.

There are countless reasons that homeless people don't just get jobs and move on in life, but all the reasons boil down to this: many homeless people have lost the ability to work steadily and provide for themselves and their loved ones. That part of them has atrophied, and to restore it takes a long time and an enormous effort.

A work ethic is not just a cultural idea; it's an integral part of being human. All of us need purpose in our lives, and doing some kind of work is a large part of that purpose. The discipline of getting up and toiling for our bread helps us feel useful. It's not unusual for people who

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dennis Major, President
Jim Kinter, 1st Vice President
Jeff Negrete, 2nd Vice President
John Frye Jr., Treasurer
Robin Duke, Secretary
Pat Bradley
Tom Cleary
Sister Mary Clennon
James Connelly
Mark Delton
Jim Devaney
Charles Farnsworth
Brian Glover
Jennifer Graves

Kathy Hoover
Cathy Johnson
Robt Levine
Steve Lutton
Carol Maul
Louis McMurray
Joel Murillo
Ann Owen
Frank Puglia
Melvin Renge
Mayo Ryan
Jim Van De Velde

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Lynn Baker
Elizabeth Fillpot
Anthony Folcarelli
John "Nip" Gallagher
Linda Moradian
Tim Nibler
Sister Ruth Marie Nickerson, CSCD
D. Harvey Oh
Robert H. Scribner
Marvin Smith
Lucy Valla
Jane Worsley

have worked all of their lives to retire, and then slip into depression and hopelessness because they no longer have that structure in their lives.

Drug addicts, alcoholics, ex-cons, and mentally ill folks are knocked off the normal track of life by their problems and their choices. If they end up at Poverello, it's because the bottom has fallen out. Many of them once had jobs and were responsible, but now, they're living hand-to-mouth and depending on others.

We live in patterns and routines, whether we recognize them or not. Life on the street becomes a very strong, seductive and isolating routine, one that is difficult to break. Once someone hits the street, his soul, his ambition, and the perseverance necessary to keep a job all atrophy, just as surely as would his joints and muscles if his leg were in a cast for several weeks or months.



Not only does a homeless person have difficult obstacles to overcome, such as an insatiable urge for drugs, an uncontrollable mental illness, or a criminal record; he also has a withered sense of self-worth and a decayed ethic of responsibility that cripple his chances of success. One sober alcoholic who spent some time on the street and at the local rescue mission put it this way: “You get addicted to the street lifestyle, and it becomes hard to do normal things again, like holding down a job. I really do think that the lifestyle itself is a separate addiction.”

When we help someone escape homelessness, it is usually a big deal. We've often invested years and a lot of money in doing so, especially for men in our Resident Program. It sometimes pays off, and it sometimes doesn't. For the homeless person, the process of moving from vagrant to responsible citizen is fraught with difficulty, and for those of us trying to help, it's often frustrating. However, at the Pov, our whole reason for existing is helping people who have atrophied souls, and the outcome of our work is something we can't control. It's ultimately up to God and the person receiving the assistance.

Mike

Order and Chaos

Chaos is, for humans, an intolerable state. People who have lived in war-torn lands, characterized by wanton destruction and day-to-day unpredictability, often experience numerous mental and physical problems that result from the horrors they witness. Urban areas where crime and disorder are rampant create such tremendous anxiety for residents that many exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Although chaos is intolerable, many people are nevertheless drawn toward it. Those whose lives lack purpose often prefer the constant excitement of crisis and chaos to divert their attention from their own tedious and futile endeavors. For example, drug addicts seem to crave the madness that comes with their use of illegal substances. This is why sobriety, with its emphasis on order and responsibility, is such a hard-sell with addicts.

At Poverello House, many of those we see are people in perpetual crisis. After dealing with them for a while, one starts to discern a pattern. When given a second or third chance at a new start, they inevitably seem to turn away and choose a course toward more chaos. The addict, after obtaining health, salvaging torn relationships, recovering financially and experiencing the spiritual peace that comes with sustained sobriety, will often opt to start dabbling in drugs again, with predictable results; the woman who is escaping domestic violence will cast herself back into the maelstrom of the destructive relationship, even after ample evidence that by doing so she is endangering herself and the lives of her children; a mentally ill person, after experiencing relief from his torment through psychiatric medications, stops taking them, and relapses into paranoia, delusional thinking, or hallucinations.

What motivates such people to steer a course toward chaos and despair? It would take an expert in mental and emotional pathology to adequately answer that question, but our experience at Poverello House gives us a perspective that might offer some insight.

Human nature is such that we all incline toward the familiar and the comfortable. Most people, if given the choice between entering two rooms, one full of strangers, the other full of old acquaintances and good friends, would naturally choose the latter.

The same gravitational pull of familiarity exists on the streets. Skid

rows or jails are harsh, dirty, and dangerous, but for many, they represent communities that are comfortable and forgiving. Behaviors that would be deplored in other parts of town are ignored in such settings; people who have been rejected in other arenas of life can find acceptance, or at least tolerance, on the streets or while incarcerated. As hard to believe as it might be for someone unfamiliar with homelessness, street life for some is emotionally comfortable, because people grow accustomed to it.

There is a price to pay for that comfort and acceptance, however. When these people surround themselves with like-minded compatriots, who are willing to put up with their aberrant behavior, they receive little in the way of corrective criticism. With peer support for their self-destructive ways, they continue to create chaos in their lives. They stumble from crisis to crisis, and gradually come to depend on others to extricate them from their messes.

Dependency breeds contempt and rationalization, and so many homeless people we know are angry; they depend on Poverello and other organizations for their sustenance, but they also resent the fact that they are dependent. The anger fuels more hopelessness and depression, which prompts them to seek out the excitement of a crisis once again, completing the terrible cycle. The amazing thing is that this process is generally unconscious; the afflicted person can't, or won't, see what's happening to himself.

We once had a young man in our Resident Program who was in his mid-twenties, but had already been in thirteen drug rehab programs before he came to ours. He never finished our program, and was irate but manipulative while he was here. He began using heroin again the day he left the program. His pattern was set, and probably the rest of his life will be spent getting high on drugs, getting in trouble, and either going to jail or to yet another program. He had absolutely no insight into his condition.

Whether or not such people are hopeless is not for us at Poverello to determine. We need to set boundaries when we help them, because otherwise, they'll burn out our staff and use up scarce resources; but help them we must, because that's our mission and our role in the community. When their crises take them all the way down to the streets, Poverello House is here to try to pick them up, and give them yet another opportunity to get it right.

Culinary Contributions

A unique training program has been going on for several years now at Poverello House. The Institute of Technology (I.T.) has a chef certification program. Our own Food Service Director, Tito Olazabal, is a graduate of I.T., and used his connection to the school to get the staff and students involved.

Each month, Chef Molly Hudson, I.T. Culinary Mentor Instructor/ Extern Coordinator, brings a large group of students to Poverello House, and they ply their trade in our kitchen, putting together a delicious lunch meal for the homeless and hungry. It exposes the students to a very different side of food preparation and presentation, and it gives our homeless guests a special treat that is eagerly anticipated.

It's been a great relationship. Molly is considered to be one of our Poverello family members now, and her humor, professionalism, and enthusiasm make each visit a wonderful learning experience for her students. We're honored to be a training site for one of the premier culinary institutions in the area.



Molly Hudson (center) gives a student some tips during the Institute of Technology's monthly training in the Poverello House kitchen. Typically, fifteen to twenty students come each month and prepare restaurant-quality meals for the homeless here

Saturday, May 8, 2010

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF LETTER CARRIERS**

**Stamp
Out
Hunger**
FOOD DRIVE



PUT YOUR NON-PERISHABLE DONATION
IN A BAG BY YOUR MAILBOX.
WE'LL DELIVER IT TO A LOCAL FOOD BANK.

NATIONAL PARTNERS



**PRIORITY
MAIL**
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Campbell's

Valpak

UNITED WAY

AFL-CIO

**FEEDING
AMERICA**

Mark your calendars for *Saturday, May 8, 2010* for the annual “**Stamp Out Hunger**” food drive, sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers. For the past two years, Stamp Out Hunger has benefited Poverello House, bringing in tons of non-perishable food. Remember the date, and remember to put some cans of food out for your letter carrier!

May Wish List

Ground beef * Hot dogs * Eggs * Butter

Fresh fruit * Fresh vegetables

Herbs/spices.

Men's clothing: Jeans, t-shirts, underwear,
shoes, socks

8 ½ x 11 copy paper * Blank envelopes

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

To donate online, visit our website at www.poverellohouse.org

Poverello House

412 F Street
P.O. Box 12225
Fresno, CA 93777-2225
(559) 498-6988

NON PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FRESNO, CA 93706
PERMIT #2440

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