



Poverello News

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www.poverellohouse.org

SIMPLICITY AMIDST COMPLEXITY

Spend a few minutes at Poverello House, and if you're not used to being here, you may be overwhelmed by what seems to be the complexity of the place. The sheer number of services offered, and the crowds of people being served can be quite staggering to the uninitiated. Someone recently described it as "beautiful chaos." That is a colorful expression, but it perhaps falls short of the mark. What seems to be chaotic is simply the existence of many moving parts, all of which add up to create a place where there is tangible help and an atmosphere of grace for the poor.



A good example of both concrete help and graciousness is our Contact Office. As people queue up in the morning in front of it, Imelda Leon, Volunteer Coordinator/Office Manager, and Mary McGarvin, who assists Imelda, prepare for another busy day. The Contact Office is the hub of our organization, the place where all those moving parts of Poverello House intersect: homeless clients, volunteers, court-ordered community service workers, staff members, residents and donors.

The Contact Office not only keeps track of thousands of hours of volunteer time, but we also answer and direct all phone calls, provide information to callers and visitors, sort and deliver mail to homeless clients who call Poverello their home (3,000 pieces delivered last year), hand out items to Poverello residents, act as a check-in point for the Village of Hope, take messages for and from staff members, post messages for homeless people, distribute bandages, pens, paper and board games to the homeless, and oversee volunteer orientations. It is at once a communications and distribution center.

The Contact Office is a microcosm of Poverello House at large: a complex of purposeful activity. Here at Poverello House, everyone has a job to do for the benefit of the homeless, but more than what we do, it is the spirit in which everything is done. At the Contact Office, in the midst of the constant activity, Imelda and Mary never miss an opportunity to listen to the long, sad story of someone who just needs to talk; they never hand out a bandage, volunteer badge, or a piece of writing paper without a kind word or smile, and they never say goodbye to a volunteer or donor without offering a heartfelt thanks. Anyone who shows up at the Contact Office will always feel welcome.

The complexity that takes place there is real. It's the simple grace behind the complexity that makes it beautiful.

*Please join us for the 3rd Annual
**Gift of Hope Gala, Celebrating
45 years of Transforming Lives.**
October 20, 2018, from 6:00 to
11:00 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel
in downtown Fresno. For more
information, please visit
poverellohouse.org/gift-of-hope*

FOUNDATIONS

Before there was a building, which is the physical manifestation of Poverello House, there was a spirit, embodied not only by Mike and Mary McGarvin, but by the early volunteers who came to help when things were rough. Some of those original volunteers constitute a pantheon of Poverello saints, without whose help there would probably not be a Poverello House today.

It's true that Papa Mike was the one who started it all by handing out sandwiches he and Mary made, but Mike details in his autobiography how he became exhausted from working full time and doing his street ministry. He got to the point that he was thinking about giving up feeding the homeless, when a handful of stalwart volunteers showed up to keep him going. Foremost in Papa Mike's recollection was Frank Stommel.

Frank, who Mike described as a "big bear of a man," was Dutch. He'd known hardship during World War II, as he and his family had to keep on the move to escape the Nazis, and then rebuild his life after the war. A faithful Catholic, Frank had a huge heart and a fearless faith. Papa Mike recalled how on many occasions, Frank would wade into a melee and try to restore peace, ignoring his own safety.

His heavily-accented, booming voice, and the joy that radiated from his smile and his eyes, seemed not only to inspire trust in wary homeless people, but also served to protect him from aggression. Like Papa Mike, being big also worked in Frank's favor; sometimes an imposing physical presence is not a bad thing on the streets.

Attending to the needs of desperate people seemed to be something that Frank loved to do. There are not too many photos of him from the early days on the streets, but in those pictures that we do have, you can see his radiance as he fed or hugged the homeless.

There are few people remaining at Poverello House who met Frank personally, but those who remember him can attest to his warmth, and the unique way that he would rivet his smiling eyes on you and make you feel that you were the most important person in the room. Can you imagine how that kind of magnetic acceptance made the homeless feel?

View to the Soul, the display of Papa Mike's and other artists' photographs of the homeless at the Jeffrey Scott Agency, was a walk back in time. It reminded us of where we came from and how the foundations of today's Poverello House were built over four decades ago, not only by Papa Mike, but also by the courage and passion of those first volunteers such as Frank Stommel.



Frank Stommel (second from right)

POVERELLO PONDERINGS...

Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it.

—Albert Schweitzer

Thank you to all of our amazing volunteers!

FROM THE DESK OF CEO CRUZ AVILA



On a weekly basis, my staff and I give tours of Poverello House to people who are interested in our services. At the end of every tour, the common phrase I hear is “I didn’t know Poverello House did so much, you provide so many different services.” Over the years, Poverello House has been seen or referenced in the community as a “soup kitchen.” Poverello House, since it started 45 years ago, has always been more than just a “soup kitchen.” Papa Mike when passing out peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to the homeless always took a personal interest in their lives. He learned about their families, their failures, hopes about the future, and how they became homeless. Papa Mike gave them hope that someone actually cared about them. When I started at the Poverello House, I would often sit with Papa Mike and talk with him about life’s joys, sorrows, and how as an organization we can provide more services to improve the life of the homeless. It was out of these talks I had with Papa Mike that Poverello House expanded its existing services to the needy and the homeless living in Fresno County.

As we prepare for our 3rd annual Gift of Hope Gala- 45 Years of Transforming Lives, I reflect upon my my talks with Papa Mike, and also his legacy. I am humbled and honored to continue expanding and providing services to those in the greatest need. Join me on October 20th at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Fresno as we celebrate 45 years of transforming lives. Please visit poverellohouse.org/gift-of-hope for more information.

Proceeds from this event help fund a wide range of services to support the community, such as MAP Point at Poverello and our rural MAP Points in Parlier, Reedley and Sanger providing people linkages to social and mental health services, drug treatment programs, job resources and housing programs. Poverello House’s Mobile Café provides a hot nutritious meal to people living in rural communities who do not have access to our meals. Poverello House provides overnight shelter for homeless individuals and families. We have the men’s residential drug rehabilitation for men suffering from the disease of addiction and help them become thriving members of our community. The homeless can also utilize our showers, laundry and medical and dental clinic. We also serve up to 1,200 meals per day 365 days out the year. Poverello House is more than just a soup kitchen. Poverello House is dedicated to **“enriching the lives and spirits of those who pass our way.”** Enrichment can be a meal, a shower, overnight shelter, drug treatment, clean clothes, linkages to services, or a case manager who will listen to their story and provide them hope for a productive life.

Cruz Avila, CEO

WAYS YOU CAN HELP THIS MONTH

We would be very grateful
for donations of:

Colored paper, disinfectant
wipes, gauze, ibuprofen, large
hand sanitizer, Ace bandages,
coloring books for adults,
bicycle tire patches