



P.O. Box 12225
Fresno, CA 93777-2225

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FRESNO, CA
PERMIT NO. 2440

A Journey of Hope

50TH ANNIVERSARY • 2023

50 YEARS POVERELLO NEWS

SPECIAL EDITION VOL.4

ON THE LEVEL: THE POWER OF A PHOTO

As we go through our 50th year of serving those experiencing homelessness in Fresno County, we often reflect on how Michael McGarvin, our founder, was the first Outreach worker. He built rapport with the unhoused in Chinatown and consistently lent a helping hand or a listening ear. Mike McGarvin's fellowship with those experiencing homelessness is how he was given the nickname "Papa Mike." The unhoused community found comfort and security in Mike, as he continuously showed up for them. The peanut butter and jelly sandwiches he handed out were just an incentive to get to know the people. Eventually, the people didn't seek Mike out for food but rather for conversation. He got to know our clients on a personal level. As the organization grew, Mike relinquished decision making to a board of directors and executive officer. His passion remained being with the clients and building the relationships he did. As his health deteriorated, Papa Mike's stewardship at Poverello House continued during mealtimes, where he would sit at his "observation post" and do his "maitre' d' duty." This is when Papa Mike would introduce himself to new faces, engage with regular clients, and share stories. Mike had many stories of his time at Poverello in San Francisco, his time creating the Fresno Poverello House, and his life journey. Mike shares many of these stories in his photography book,

On the Level: Walking the Streets with Mike McGarvin, and his autobiography, ***Papa Mike***.

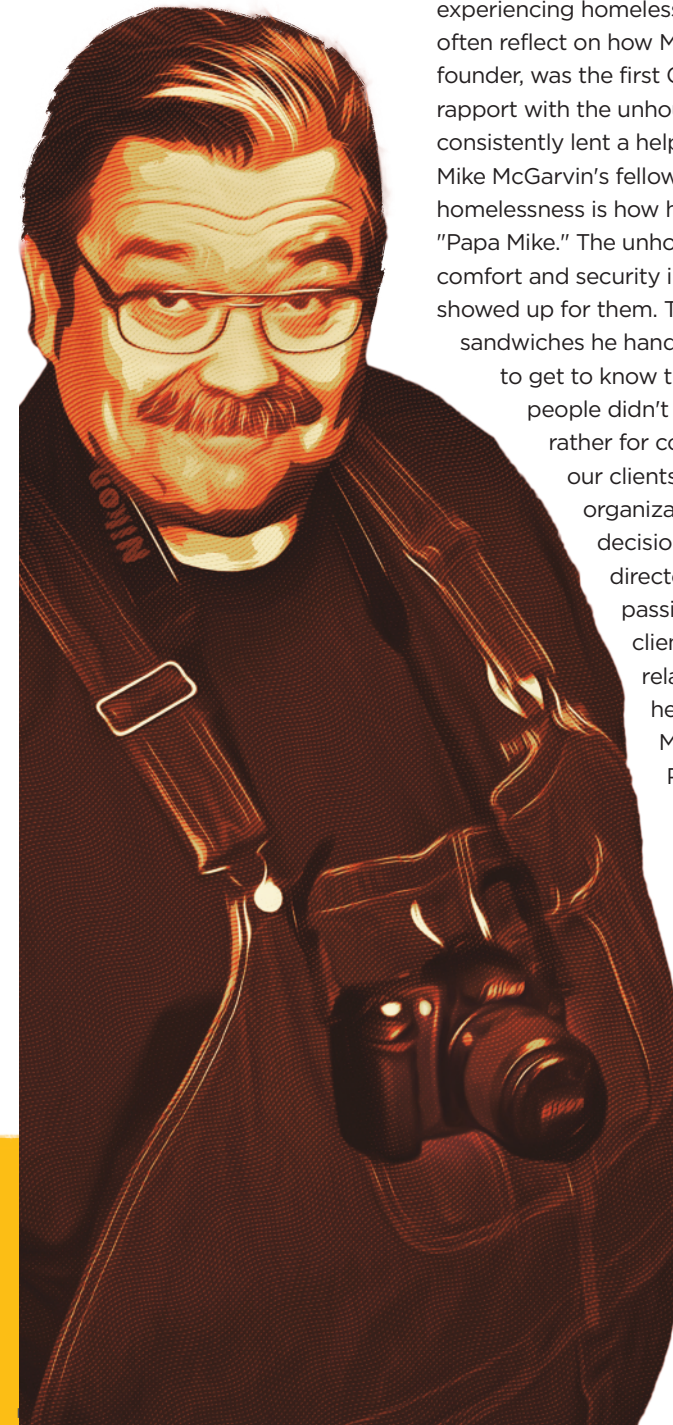
In his book *On the Level*, Mike says, "A gifted writer might be able to describe in words what I show here in photographs, but since I'm not a writer, permit me to tell my story with pictures." Papa Mike spent decades photographing the unhoused community, and it is a gift to share those with the public now. Mike took photos to show "those who don't understand the trauma of poverty to see the poor are not faceless." He hoped his photos would say, "We are poor, but not too different than you. We love, we hurt, and we bleed. Please see us." The power of a photograph can tell a million stories, and these photos show us how the unhoused community is not invisible, and they are people too. Poverello House invites you to "On the Level with Papa Mike," an Art Hop event where you can see firsthand the power of a photo.

Poverello House has worked with three local photographers to capture the current homeless experience in Fresno County, surrounding rural areas, and the shelter experience at Poverello House. The unhoused photo project is to build awareness of the experience of homelessness and the conditions lived in, showcased through the work of Photographers John Reynolds, Lance Pearce, and Joel Pickford.

These photographers recognized that something as simple as acknowledging a person could change the trajectory of that individual's day, week, or life. Like Papa Mike, we hope to treat everyone that passes our way with dignity and respect.

"I hope these photographs will touch the hearts of all who see them. The cup of human kindness needs replenishing, and I pray these photos will motivate those who see them to consider lending a hand to the work being done at Poverello House."

- **Mike McGarvin, *On the Level*, 1993.**



POVERELLO HOUSE JOINS ART HOP!

Thursday May 4th, 2023 at 5 PM

CVS Parking Lot
1302 Fulton St Fresno, CA 93721

The one time event will build awareness towards the unhoused community and the conditions lived in their homeless experience.

We hope you attend the event and are moved in your spirit to get involved to better the community for all.

A Journey of Hope



Street Ministry Photographed by
Joel Pickford, John Reynolds, and Lance Pearce.
On the Level Photographs by Mike McGarvin.
Poverello House Food Truck Serving Downtown!





Zack Darrah
Poverello House CEO

LOWER YOUR TAXES BY GIVING FROM YOUR IRA

If you are over 70.5 years old, have IRA accounts, and support Poverello House, you may be able to reduce your taxes by giving directly from your IRA. Giving from your IRA directly to Poverello House is known as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). QCDs are not reported to you as income, lowering your overall tax burden.

For more information about how you can support the life-sustaining, hope-inspiring work of Poverello House AND save on your taxes, go to www.poverellohouse.org or call 559-498-6988.

DIGNITY IS OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

As you may well know, our mission statement begins with "Believing in the dignity of every person." That is certainly our belief and a belief that we live out in the way we serve others daily. I am confident that this is something that those with who Poverello House engages feels and knows deeply. This is at the heart of why we continue advancing this belief through how we do our work. This belief in the dignity of every person is why we replaced the Tuff Shed shelters with Pallet Shelters in the Village of Hope, why we have free wi-fi on our campus, why we renovated our shower/laundry facilities, and why we are opening a full-service restaurant for all on our campus called "Papa Mike's Café."

Often, this concept of dignity is reflected to mean that those who are on the streets, struggling with substance abuse, or have a mental illness, deserve a level of honor or respect even amid their struggles. I wish that were the case for everyone in our community. I have heard many appalling statements and observed many actions of members of this community that do not align with the core of why Poverello House exists. However, dignity as humans is a shared reality and a shared responsibility for all of us to uphold.

I came across this powerful quote by Pope Francis that says,

"Human dignity is the same for all human beings; when I trample on the dignity of another, I am trampling on my own."

I would further this statement to say that when we uphold the dignity of another, we also collectively uphold our own. I speak with people on our campus almost daily whose dignity has been trampled underfoot by many. This is why Papa Mike's work and the work that still goes on 50 years later, have made such an impact. He would uphold your dignity, value, and worth regardless of your circumstance. His treatment of those on the street was quite different from what they were used to up until that point.

The dignity of every person lives deeply in our bones here at Poverello House and many of you are creating the space for that to be shared to "all who pass our way." Thank you! May we all feel the responsibility of ensuring that the dignity of another is upheld rather than trampled through the way we love others in action daily.

Blessings,

Zack

FROM THE POVERELLO HOUSE NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

BY PAPA MIKE MCGARVIN
JUNE, 2015

"ONE OF MY QUIRKS IS THAT WHEN I GET AN IDEA IN MY HEAD FOR A PICTURE I WANT TO TAKE, I CAN'T REST UNTIL IT'S DONE."

Sometimes this creative streak works itself into a great photo essay; sometimes, the pictures (under the advisement of wiser heads than mine) never see the light of day. Recently, I again got the obsession. In my semi-invalid state, I don't move around much. I sit on my perch in the dayroom and do a lot more observing than I used to, and lately, I've been noticing people's hands. That old song quoted above was performed by several people, including Johnny Cash. We often judge people by their looks, their deeds, or their income. Maybe this song has something to say about a better way to view people.

Hands tell stories, and not in the way palm readers say they do. Calloused hands that are bent and inflamed, with embedded dirt and cracked skin, tell one kind of tale. Such hands can convey that the person to whom they belong has labored long and hard in his or her life, and, as such, might be honest (because he/she chose to work rather than steal), self-reliant, and possibly wise. An old veteran who used to regularly eat at Poverello House had gnarled, horribly twisted hands with swollen knuckles on all his fingers. Upon encountering this man, the first thought someone might have had would be that he had severe arthritis. That may have

been an accurate assessment, but the main source of his deformities was not naturally-occurring rheumatism but rather the torture he endured during the Korean War. He was captured, and the enemy smashed his fingers and broke his hands, among other atrocities. He talked freely about the ordeal and denied that it had resulted in a lasting impact on his psyche, but then, you could always smell alcohol on his breath as he spoke. Perhaps his hands and boozy breath revealed more about his inner demons than he would willingly acknowledge.

Conversely, smooth hands are like an unexpressive face: they convey little about the person, other than the fact that he or she hasn't spent much time doing manual labor. Such a person could have made a living at a computer job, as a bank teller, a retail clerk, or even conning others out of their life savings. There's really little that you can definitely read from such hands, other than the fact that the person hasn't been a mechanic, farm worker, or carpenter. For someone like me, with a habit of making odd observations, Poverello House clients offer a wealth of information through their hands. I've noticed that the hands

have changed over the years. In the 1970s, when most of the people we served were older alcoholics and heroin addicts, almost all of them had hard-luck hands, full of character. Nowadays, one can find more soft hands without much wear. Many of the addicts here have been using drugs since their youth and survived by drug dealing, stealing, and other criminal ways of earning money. Unlike the drunks and junkies of the old days, they haven't worked in the fields or in construction. Their lives may have been horrible, but they have also been less physically taxing.

Reading hands is a deductive process that is prone to error. The generalities I just described could be way off. But maybe Johnny Cash was onto something. Perhaps when it's time to judge the homeless, the Good Lord will look at their hands and see that in spite of their failures, many of them did the best they could with the lot they were given in life. I imagine that the merciful God I know will take into account the calluses, broken fingernails, and leathery skin and show some grace to many people who could never find it here on this earth.



NOW I'M TIRED AND I'M OLD AND I HAVEN'T MUCH GOLD, MAYBE THINGS AIN'T BEEN ALL THAT I PLANNED, BUT LORD ABOVE HEAR MY PLEA, WHEN ITS TIME TO JUDGE ME TAKE A LOOK AT THESE HARD-WORKING HANDS.

-Lyrics by Don Robey

Joel Pickford Photography