



# Poverello News

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## FROM THE DESK OF C.E.O. CRUZ AVILA

The book of Ruth in the Old Testament is about two women's devotion to each other despite tragedy, famine, and despair. Naomi was forced to leave her home when her husband and sons died because of a famine. Ruth, her daughter-in-law, refused to stay behind and followed Naomi to a foreign land. Eventually, the two women's loyalty to each other and their faith in God was rewarded: Ruth married a man named Boaz, and took care of Naomi for the rest of her life.



As a child, I watched my parent's great love and loyalty to each other. It was through their connection with each other they were able to serve others. My mother was a nurse in a clinic in Mexicali for eight years, where she provided medical care to everyone who came to the clinic. Eventually, she moved to Hollister, California where she met and married my father. Through hard work and service to others they built a great life for themselves. They were true partners in their married life and shared the American dream together. Even though my father passed away last year, my mother honors his memory by continuing to volunteer at Poverello House.

As CEO of Poverello House, I try to lead the organization by the examples set by my parents, Papa Mike and his wife Mary, and the message of the book of Ruth. There is a passage in the book that illustrates how commitment to a cause, or to one another, can bring hope when everything else seems hopeless. Naomi tries to convince Ruth to forsake her because she cannot offer her anything. Ruth, however, replies "Don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you.... Where you go, I will go, and where you stay I will stay.... Your people will be my people and your God will be my God." Here at Poverello House, we do not turn

anyone away. We continue on our mission and commitment to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way.

Cruz Avila, CEO



## WAYS YOU CAN HELP THIS MONTH

### Donations for Naomi's House:

Socks  
Women's underwear  
Flip flop-type sandals  
Hygiene items  
Work clothes (office attire)

## THE MYSTERY OF GOODNESS

Dr. Robert Levine is a longtime friend of Poverello House and former member of our board of directors. Besides being a great guy, he is a distinguished social psychologist, a professor at California State University, Fresno, and a renowned author. He has a lively intellect coupled with a true scientist's curiosity about life.

In 2017, Bob published a book called *Stranger in the Mirror: The Scientific Search for the Self*. It is a captivating exploration of the conceptual and empirical realities of "the self," what it means, why it is hard to truly apprehend, and how it is affected by natural and societal processes. The book is a delight to read, as Bob tackles a complex subject with a graceful and engaging writing style. However, what interests us most about Bob's book is a large portion of one chapter that is devoted to understanding what made our founder, "Papa" Mike McGarvin, the person that he was.

Bob has a deep reverence for the work of Poverello, and he is fascinated by the mystery of Mike's turbulent past transformed into his later compassion toward the poor. He poses the question of how somebody raised in a horribly abusive and dysfunctional home, and who spent much of his youth committing crimes, using drugs and engaging in violence, could become what Bob calls "...the symbol of benevolence in Fresno". (p. 217)

The history of Poverello House is interwoven with Papa Mike's seemingly mythic personal history. Bob's examination of Mike takes an interesting path. He compares and contrasts Papa Mike to Oskar Schindler, the German businessman who risked his life and fortune to rescue Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Bob chronicles how Schindler descended into alcoholism, financial ruin, and collapse after the war, and concludes while that he rose to his great calling during the threat of Jewish extermination in Germany, he had no overarching purpose in life afterwards, and therefore disintegrated. Mike, on the other hand, embraced the poor and never looked back. Bob hypothesizes that because the poor are always with us, Papa Mike continued to find purpose and meaning, once he had discovered his vocation.



The other interesting thing that Bob points out is the confluence of timing and events that led to Papa Mike's "Road to Damascus" conversion. He discovered the San Francisco Poverello at exactly the right time for himself; earlier, he would not have been ready to change, later, he would have been too far gone in drug abuse and hopelessness. Father Simon was the perfect person to welcome him into the church, a deeply spiritual man who was unconditionally accepting.

There is one area of the McGarvin mystery that Bob does not investigate. That one missing variable is the hand of God, to which Mike always ascribed his radical change of heart and direction. There is much insight that Bob offers about the giant personality that we knew to be Papa Mike McGarvin, and for that, we are very grateful. Mike's life was fascinating, inspirational, and yes, mysterious, but certainly the hypothesis of God's guidance can account for the intricate interplay of meeting the right people at just the right time, all of which led to a revolution in his soul. As we follow in Mike's footsteps at Poverello House, we also acknowledge that we have the privilege of serving the poor through the same divine leading that changed an angry young drug abuser into someone the homeless called "Papa."

## A HAVEN OF HOPE AND HELP FOR HOMELESS WOMEN

Being homeless is tough, and it's especially tough if you're a woman. You continually run the risk of being physically and sexually assaulted, or becoming a victim of human trafficking. Mike McGarvin and other community leaders saw the need to have a shelter for single homeless women, and formed Naomi's House in 2002. Naomi's House, a program of Poverello House, is the only low-barrier shelter for single homeless women in Fresno County. This 28-bed facility is a refuge for women trying to escape from the extreme cold, the summer heat, and the dangerous, vulnerable life of sleeping on the street. The goal of Naomi's House is to provide a safe a haven of



security and overnight shelter, and to link women to social services, mental health services and housing programs that are needed to end their homelessness, enabling them to become thriving members of our community.

Every woman at Naomi's House is someone's daughter, mother, aunt or sister. "Pam", a former client, had been homeless for over a decade and suffered from severe mental illness. She had not seen her family in years, but yearned to be reunited with them. Despite her mental illness and homelessness, Pam had a dream of someday cooking Sunday dinner for her family. At Naomi's House, she was assigned a case manager. Through patience, perseverance, and determination, Pam's case manager linked her to the mental health services she needed and to a housing program that would provide ongoing support. On her move-in day, Naomi's House was able to stock her up with essential household items and food. Her case manager routinely checks on her and is happy to report that she is still cooking Sunday dinner for her family.

Naomi's House has experienced tremendous success in enriching the lives of women and elevating their self-worth and self-esteem. It is a long-running program at Poverello House and one that deeply touched Papa Mike's heart. Although Naomi's House has been funded through a grant from HUD, that funding will terminate on June 30, 2018. There is a tremendous need to continue providing overnight shelter and resources that give our most vulnerable clients hope for a better life. For the homeless 18-year-old girl with learning disabilities, the senior woman in a wheelchair whose mental illness has destroyed her relationships, and for the addicted mother who has lost her children but dreams of someday making Sunday Dinner for her family—Naomi's House is greatly needed.

**Saturday - June 2nd, 2018**  
**5K Timed Run - 7:30 AM | 2 Mile Walk - 7:45 AM**

**POVERELLO HOUSE 2018**  
 — SIXTH — ANNUAL (5K) WOODWARD PARK FRESNO  
**RUN FOR MEALS**

**HELP END HUNGER**

**POVERELLOHOUSE.ORG/5KRUN**





## Poverello House

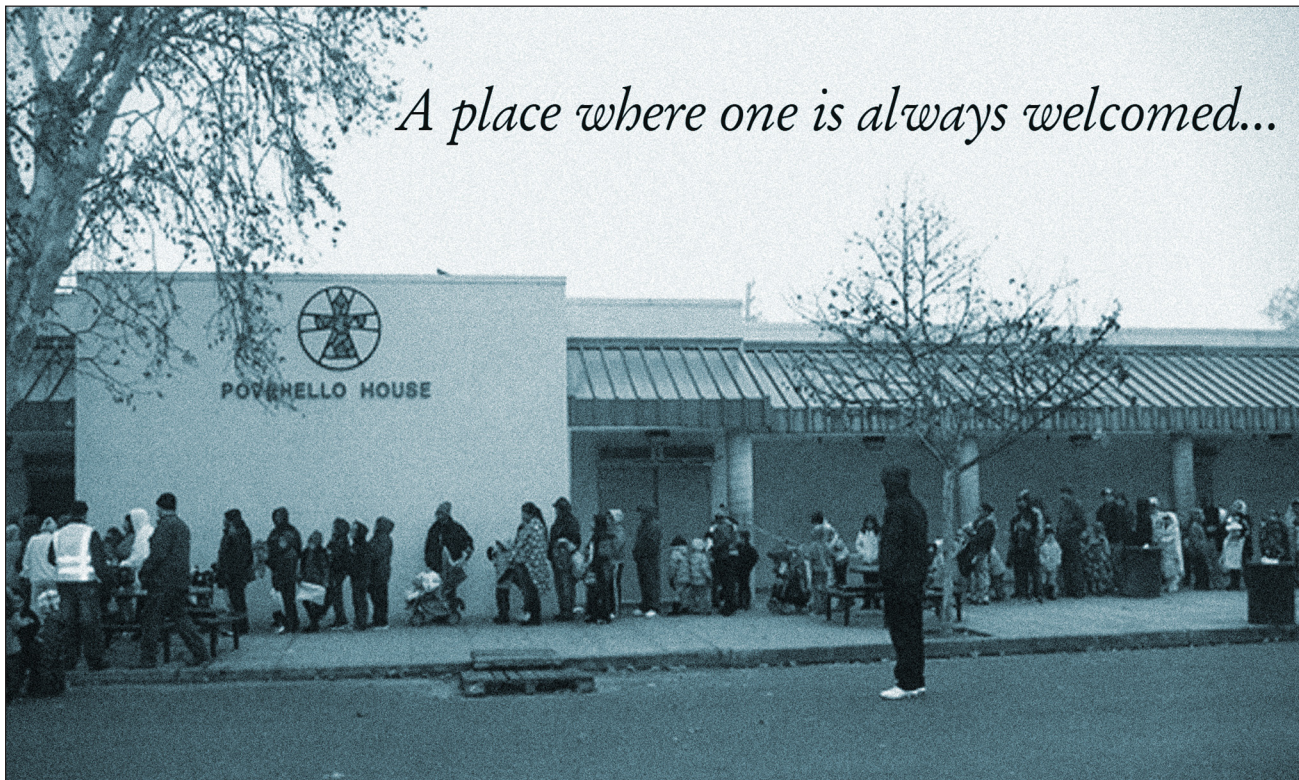
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