



Poverello News

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POVERELLO'S HIDDEN JEWEL

There is an amazing little mission almost unseen within the Poverello House walls. Day in and day out, Holy Cross Clinic at Poverello House treats dozens of people with mundane to severe medical and dental problems, and treats them all with skill, efficiency and great kindness.

The Holy Cross Clinic's history goes all the way back to the year 1982. Papa Mike McGarvin was transporting people to clinics and the county hospital regularly in a rattletrap van. He saw a very real need for there to be some kind of medical care at Poverello. He talked to the then-director of St. Agnes Medical Center, who sent a nurse practitioner to help out.

The clinic has come a long way since those days. We recently spoke with Sister Mary Clennon, Director of the Holy Cross Clinic, Dr. Bill Geissert, the clinic's Medical Director, and Dr. Daniel Prescott, a physician who runs the eye clinic at Holy Cross. Each gave a different perspective about this truly incredible service.

Sister Mary said that one of the most impressive aspects of Holy Cross Clinic is the number of specialized treatments it offers. Currently, there are clinics in dermatology, diabetes, physical therapy, urology, and eye problems. In addition, dental care has been offered since 1989.

One of the great successes is the diabetes clinic. Sister Mary said, "We have a database for the diabetic patients, so we can see what their blood sugars were when they first came, and the progress they're making. It's a BIG deal." If not for the clinic, many of these patients might not have been able to regulate their diabetes, and would be in crisis, or perhaps even dead.

Dr. Geissert is in his third year as Medical Director for the clinic, although he began volunteering at Holy Cross over twelve years ago. In his current role, he mainly oversees the volunteer nurse practitioners, but also treats many patients. When the problem is beyond the scope of what they are able to do at the clinic, they have a multitude of relationships with physicians and medical facilities where they refer patients. "There are a lot of people who have their fingers in this," he said of the vast network that assists clinic patients.

Dr. Daniel Prescott began volunteering at the clinic in 1998 or 1999, before he went to medical school. He has since become an ophthalmologist, specializing in retinas. He provides eye examinations, particularly for those with diabetes. After going away to medical school, he moved back to the area, and began helping in the clinic, this time as a physician. He summed up his experience here: "I find the patients are very appreciative and happy I'm there, and it's nice to help."

All medical and dental care is free of charge to patients, and it is available to anyone in need. Holy Cross Clinic is an oasis of hope on the streets.



Sister Alice, left, and David Tuohy-Mote, second from right. They were the first nurses for the clinic.



A WORD FROM MARY McGARVIN



Whenever I see friends, they inevitably ask, “How are you doing?”, obviously worried that I’m overcome with grief. I really appreciate their concern, but the truth is, in spite of some hard days and weeks, I’ve been doing surprisingly well since Mike passed away last July. Of course I miss him, everything about him. Most of all, I miss his big bear hugs. However, I’m amazed that I’m not terribly depressed. I think there are two main reasons for this.

First, Poverello House embraced me and gave me a reason to get up in the mornings. I come over and help each day in the Contact Office, but I think doing that helps me more than any help I’m giving to Pov. It keeps my mind from wandering into dark places because it keeps me busy with useful and needed work. Also, the daily interaction with the homeless on a one-to-one basis puts my pain in perspective. So many of these people are deeply wounded, and when I can do my part to diminish their burdens just a little, it eases my load.

The second reason I’m doing OK is that although I miss Mike terribly, I see him everywhere at Poverello. Before someone calls a psychiatrist to report me, let me explain myself. When I see staff and volunteers working at Poverello, I see Mike. All the things he used to do in the early days all by himself, now there are so many others doing those same things. When the staff does outreach on the streets, that’s what Mike did in those early days. Here at Pov, there is always water available to the homeless; Mike used to drive around with water jugs and cups back in the 1970s. The MAP program staff members transport, support, and find housing for people living in the streets, all things that Mike used to do. And of course, Mike loved to feed people, and that’s something that never changes here.

When I see so much going on, I see a little Mike here, a little of him there, and on and on. He’s not physically here, but it’s almost as if he were. It touches my heart, and it’s hard to describe just how much it reassures me. Mike used to help people without questioning whether they were “worthy” of being helped; he just loved them like God loves us. Poverello House still does that, day in, day out. It really comforts me, and it keeps Mike alive for me.



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

Because my mother was a nurse, the Holy Cross Clinic at Poverello House has a special place in my heart. Poverello House, a leader in providing social services to the homeless, also provides clients access to medical and dental care through the Holy Cross Clinic, located on our campus.

Providing the homeless easy access to medical care saves the community thousands of dollars. Often the only way the homeless can receive care is through the emergency room. The average emergency room visit in Fresno County costs about \$2,200. Waiting to be seen at the E.R. for basic medical care can take hours, and therefore many of the homeless forgo needed treatment. The Holy Cross Clinic at Poverello House is open every week and is easily accessible both to people who live in the neighborhood and the homeless. The wait times are relatively short, so that patients do not have to worry about missing a meal or other services we provide.



*Poverello CEO Cruz Avila with Sister Mary Clennon,
Director of Holy Cross Clinic at Poverello House*

Whenever we give tours of Poverello House, when we come to the Holy Cross Clinic, people's most common response is, "I had no idea." The Clinic provides an astonishing range of medical and dental services, and the compassion with which these services are rendered is wonderful. For example, Sister Mary has a volunteer doctor that is particularly good at working with patients who are emotionally distraught. She makes sure that patients see this doctor if they have mental health issues. The attention to patient care is what makes the clinic a unique medical facility for the homeless, a population that is often overlooked and underserved. The volunteer doctors, nurses, dentists and dental hygienists ensure that every patient feels valued and cared for.

Papa Mike treated every person he met with dignity and respect, and at the Clinic, dignity and respect are dispensed daily. It is very hard to be homeless; it is even harder to be homeless, sick or injured. It is such a blessing to have a place that provides compassionate medical and dental care to those in need. Last year there were 4,649 medical and dental visits to the clinic. Every day the staff and volunteer heroes in the Holy Cross Clinic go about the business of healing the sick, and providing a beacon of hope to the homeless. I would like to give a special thank you to St. Agnes Medical Center for providing the staff and the funding to make the Holy Cross Clinic possible.

Thank you for enabling to us continue to "enrich the lives and spirits of those who pass our way."

Cruz Avila, CEO

WAYS YOU CAN HELP THIS MONTH

Copy paper, AA batteries, Band Aids

Blankets, milk, eggs, cheese

Sign up for the 6th Annual Run for Meals
@Poverellohouse.org/5krun



Poverello House

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Holy Cross Clinic at Poverello House, then and now. We are so grateful for the support of St. Agnes Medical Center, the wonderful medical and dental professionals who donate their skill and time, and our many partners in the medical community who treat our patients with dignity and compassion.