

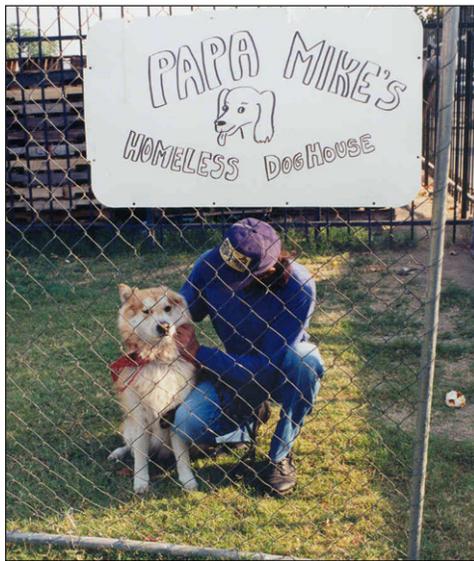


Poverello News

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LOVE OF PEOPLE, LOVE OF ANIMALS



Stories abound about St. Francis of Assisi's love of animals, particularly the legend of the Wolf of Gubbio, a man-killer tamed by the preternatural spiritual power emanating from Francis. Papa Mike McGarvin also had a very soft spot for animals. His love of both dogs and people led to the creation of "Papa Mike's Homeless Doghouse", a kennel where homeless clients can board their dogs while they receive help at Poverello. For years, Mike noticed that more and more homeless people owned dogs, both for companionship and for protection on the streets. This created a dilemma for them when they



came to Poverello House. Health department regulations did not allow them to bring their dogs in the dining room or in the Holy Cross Clinic, but if they left the dogs outside, they were often stolen.

So it was out of his love for both dogs and the homeless that Mike proposed we create a kennel where homeless clients could put their dogs while they ate at Poverello House or went to appointments on or off our campus. In the early 2000s, the kennel was built and gradually improved, but time took its toll, and it recently became obvious that it needed a facelift. Last year, Papa Mike's grandson, Tyler, made many needed improvements to it for his Eagle Scout Badge.



It really is a small thing, but sometimes the small stuff makes all the difference. St. Francis kissed a leper; it didn't change the leper's life, but it communicated to the leper that he was accepted, and in God's eyes, no longer an outcast. Papa Mike's Homeless Dog House communicates something similar. It says to the homeless, simply, we care about your dogs, which means we care about the things that concern you, and thus, we care about you. Like many things at Poverello House, it is a subtle message that carries a lot of weight. It is yet another link to our Franciscan past.

POVERELLO PONDERINGS...

Excerpts from Papa Mike McGarvin's Reflections on St. Francis

One of the things I enjoy about Poverello is the wide array of personalities that make their way to our door. I still remember unique, funny, or tragic people and their stories from three decades past. The poor have a way of being memorable. I'm sure that what Francis loved about the poor were the very things I love about them.

There are precious few rewards in this line of work. Obviously, Francis's main reward was spiritual, such as a closer walk with God and the knowledge that he was doing the will of the Lord. However, I think he must have also gotten a big kick out of the people he met. The homeless can be exasperating, demanding, and unreasonable, but they can also be charming, truthful, and endearing in ways that you don't often find in more genteel society. That's probably one big reason I've always felt at ease among the poor; the little joys outweigh the frustrations.

When we think of St. Francis, we often make the mistake of envisioning him as so spiritual that we could never relate to him. I've always viewed him in the same light as I viewed the Franciscans I met early on in San Francisco. They had all the flaws that come with being human, but the beauty of these men and women was their dedication to the poor, in spite of their flaws. I believe that Francis was such a man, someone who had a special relationship with God, but who also reveled in the humor, the complexity, and the individuality of every poor person he encountered.

—October 2011



Ways You Can Help This Month

Donate the following wish list items:

Warm men's clothing
Men's & women's shoes
Blankets
Socks
Spices
Frozen turkeys

When I started out, I had in mind a Franciscan kind of place, like Father Simon's Poverello in San Francisco, but the Fresno Poverello took a few turns and became a very different mission. That doesn't bother me as long as we don't forget where we came from. In a nutshell, our Franciscan heritage informs us that all people are our brothers and sisters, and that each was made in the image of God. That spiritual underpinning can often be lost if we begin to regard our guests solely as "clients", to whom social services are delivered. Professionalism is a good thing, as long as it doesn't turn a brother or sister into a statistical notation used to impress funding sources.

In C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, there is a discussion about losing spiritual focus: "Did ye never know...an organizer of charities who had lost all love for the poor? It is the subtlest of traps." That is what happens to a mission like ours that forgets where it came from. May God save us from ever succumbing to that kind of memory loss.

—October 2008

FROM THE DESK OF CEO CRUZ AVILA

Transformation is something we know about at Poverello House. Transformation happened when Papa Mike walked into a tiny café in San Francisco and received a cup coffee and a donut from a Franciscan priest. In turn, Mike then transformed the lives of many of the homeless when he came to Fresno and started Poverello House. I have observed many types of transformations since starting at Poverello House. I've seen men enter our drug rehabilitation program suffering from addiction, having abandoned their families. By the time they graduate, they are reunited with their families and are giving back to us and to the community by working at Poverello House.



Often, volunteers are transformed by their experiences here. Many who come for the first time are nervous and timid because they don't know what to expect. Then they catch a glimpse of that "Poverello Spirit," start returning, and soon they are invaluable partners in our mission to the homeless. It is a wonderful transformation to witness.

In yet another example, a woman who was daily using our shelter services at Naomi's House was troubled, lost and depressed. One day I did not see her come through Naomi's house and I became concerned that she may have left our care. Several weeks later I was at an event with my daughter and wife, and I heard my name being called enthusiastically. When I turned around, it was this same woman. She was bubbling with excitement and joy because she now had a home, was working and was reunited with her son. She was not the same homeless woman that entered Naomi's House. Thanks to the case management and support she received from staff at Naomi's House at Poverello, there was a dramatic transformation in her life.

These transformations have been taking place for forty-five years. Poverello House has been the beacon of hope to those in need. Volunteers, donors, and dedicated staff all contribute to dramatically changing the lives of those on the streets, and it's a blessing, and an honor, to be a part of that.

Cruz Avila, CEO

Thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Gala possible!

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