

POVERELLO NEWS

RAIDERS



DECEMBER 2015

(559) 498-6988

WWW.POVERELLOHOUSE.ORG



I've never claimed to be a balanced person. When you grow up with an abusive, alcoholic father whose hobby is producing pornography, it's tough to find balance in life, no matter how old you are.

Nevertheless, I've tried to take a balanced approach here at Poverello House, even if the balance has taken several decades.

The formula I used to use was "Papa Mike = Santa Claus." Back in the eighties, the new board of directors had to bring in an executive director because they figured out that left to my own devices, I'd give everything away and we'd have to close down.

Since that time, I've swung the other way, after being burned by the homeless on countless occasions. A few years ago, I gladly agreed to drug testing for anyone requesting bus tickets or shelter money. I started denying funds to people who behaved badly.

However, that elusive concept, "balance," still befuddles me at times, and the pendulum continues to swing back and forth. I've finally figured out that rules about how we distribute resources are necessary, but that there also has to be some latitude at times.

A good example is bicycles. Used bikes get donated often here, and everybody on the streets could probably use one. The trick is to find someone who will really use it for necessary transportation, and not trade the bike for drugs.

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We kept that rule of thumb in mind when a homeless woman we know was able to get into some assisted housing. She had a job, but getting to work meant walking or taking a bus she could not yet afford. It gave me an idea.

I checked our warehouse, but no bikes had come in recently, so I scanned the paper, and found a cheap bike. I bought it, had our guys put it together, and then we delivered it to this gal. She was thrilled. The first thing she said was, “Oh my gosh, a new bike to ride to work!”

Granted, this bike won't take her to the Tour de France, but it will help her in the long process of getting away from the streets. I didn't make her jump through a lot of hoops to get it; no drug test, no third degree interview. I figured that she had already shown quite a bit of motivation by making good decisions and getting a job.

I believe that this woman is going to do her best to stay on the right path, but every time I help someone like this, there is a risk that I'll end up disappointed. I hope, for her sake, that she can continue to put her life back together. I know that somewhere down the road, I'll probably kick myself over a similar transaction when someone burns me again. And I also know that the next time I get burned, I'll probably overreact and become a rule-following storm trooper.

Supposedly, Martin Luther said, “Human reason is like a drunken man on horseback: set it up on one side, and it tumbles over on the other.” That sums me up pretty well. I don't think that I'm predisposed to becoming a balanced person. If I was, I probably wouldn't have diabetes from enjoying my meals too much. Likewise, I doubt that I'll ever achieve that balance point in helping the homeless, especially at Christmas. During the holidays, I pull out all the stops and revert to being “Santa Mike” again. So I guess I'll keep falling off the horse on one side or the other, pray that I don't get too bruised up, and hope that God understands when I make a mistake. Christmas, the time when we celebrate the birth of the Lord of Second Chances, leads me to believe that God does indeed understand.

Mike

A Poverello Christmas Carol

The belief that depression increases during the Christmas season is probably true, although detecting mood spikes in a population is more likely to be art than science. But why an upsurge in depression, when the holiday seems to center around joy and hope?

These days, in order to understand a social phenomenon, we are more likely to turn to statistical analysis by social scientists or studies by psychologists. Few post-modern people seek insight from the great books of the past. Yet authors such as Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Dickens or Hugo are considered great not only because of their imaginative tales, but because of the deep comprehension they had of human nature and the struggles we face.

Charles Dickens can certainly shed light on our understanding of Christmas depression. Sometimes called “the man who invented Christmas,” even today our holiday traditions are deeply influenced by the Victorian practices in England, which Dickens popularized in his Christmas tales, the most famous being *A Christmas Carol*.

In that perennially popular novel, Dicken’s literary devices of the three ghosts, Christmas Past, Present and Future, ring true to many of us because they reflect our own ambivalence about Christmas. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge on a journey that illustrates the evolution of his hard heart. He sees the crushing disappointment of Christmases long gone, as well as some deliriously happy times that contrast sharply to his present miserable condition. The Ghost of Christmas Present offers him another visage of his current isolation, contrasted with the steadfast faith and joy of the Cratchett family and his nephew’s gathering with his friends. Finally, the Ghost of Christmas Future shows him grim, ghastly consequences of his selfishness. The sheer dread of those impending possibilities is perhaps the greatest catalyst for Scrooge to repent and change his behavior.

Seasonal depression is very much in evidence at Poverello House. It manifests itself in drinking and drug use that is more excessive than usual, general irritability, and sad, thousand-yard stares. Certainly much of what drives homeless people to experience this deep sadness are memories of Christmas past, the stark-

ness of Christmas present, and the apprehensive fear of Christmas future.

When we welcome people here on Christmas Day, our goal is to redeem all three of these Christmases.

When a cold, hungry person comes in and is visually treated to a dining room decorated for the holiday, served a lavish Christmas meal by a smiling volunteer, and is given a gift of warm clothing or perhaps some needed hygiene items, it can transform his sadness about the present. It then becomes a part of a good memory of the past, and perhaps even gives him hope for a better Christmas in the future. We still believe, as did Charles Dickens, that Christmas is a redemptive season, and the smiling faces each year here convince us that Christmas at Poverello House is a transformative event in the lives of Fresno's homeless.



Holiday Needs

As we do each year, we will be giving out gifts to homeless and poor individuals and families on Christmas Day. For that to happen, we need your help.

First, we'll need donations of new toys. If you'd like to help wrap gifts, check with us at the earliest possible date, because over the holidays, volunteer positions fill up FAST!

We also like to provide homeless adults with stocking caps, scarves, gloves, and warm socks, and these are also needed in great quantities. Our guests really appreciate these items, because Fresno's Tule fog makes winter cold and miserable on the streets.

And yes, we still need food, especially turkeys. Call us at (559) 498-6988 for more information, or go to our website at www.poverellohouse.org.

Run for Meals a Smashing Success!

On Saturday, October 1, 2015, we held our third annual “Run for Meals” 5K run at Woodward Park. It was an enormous success. The event raised \$44,500 for Poverello’s mission!

We are so grateful to all the sponsors, volunteers, and runners who made this year’s event possible. We should also say that everyone seemed to have a great time.

Thank you again, and we look forward to next year’s run!



With A Little Help From Our Friends

Papa Mike’s Cafe is our monthly “restaurant dinner” for the homeless. The brainchild of Chef Tito Olazabal, our Food Service Director, the concept is to serve a meal that takes time and care to prepare, seat the guest as if they have come to a fine dining establishment, and serve them with dignity and grace.

We were fortunate to recently have

some professional help with Papa Mike’s Cafe dinners. The owners of Guadalajara Restaurants and their families came and prepared chicken with mole, Mexican salad, and flan for dessert. We even had entertainment from volunteer folklorico dancers. What a blessing for the homeless and for our kitchen staff!



Poverello Books Still Available

Every year in November and December, we remind readers that we offer our two Poverello House books: *On the Level—Walking the Streets with Mike McGarvin*, and *Papa Mike*. The former is a photographic journey seen through the camera lens of Founder Mike McGarvin, as he takes you to the sometimes tragic, dangerous, and occasionally funny streets of Fresno. The second book is Mike's personal history and the history of Poverello House. The books are available for \$20 each. To order, call us at (559) 498-6988 and let us know you want to buy a book, or fill out the form below and mail it with your check, money order or credit card number to:

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

Please send me ____ copy(ies) of Mike McGarvin's book, *On the Level* (\$20 per copy).
Please send me ____ copy(ies) of Mike McGarvin's book, *Papa Mike* (\$20 per copy).

METHOD OF PAYMENT:

- Check/Money Order enclosed (Make checks payable to Poverello House)
 Credit Card

TYPE OF CARD (VISA, MASTERCARD)

ACCOUNT NUMBER / EXPIRATION DATE

CARDHOLDER SIGNATURE

CARDHOLDER TELEPHONE #

December Wish List

TURKEYS!! * New toys * Scarves * Knit caps * Gloves

To donate online, visit our website at www.poverellohouse.org

Remember, we now take credit card donations. Please see the enclosed envelope for instructions.

Poverello House

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FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

Who Are We? A nonprofit, nondenominational organization.

Our Mission: Believing in the dignity of every person, at Poverello House we work to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way by stewarding the resources made available to us through Providential and community support.

Governance: We have been operating since 1973 and are governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of local volunteer men and women.

Future Goals? To provide additional facilities for increased services.

How Are We Funded? Primarily through private donations from individuals, churches, businesses, and community organizations. Rules for acceptance and participation in the programs of Poverello House are the same for everyone, without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.