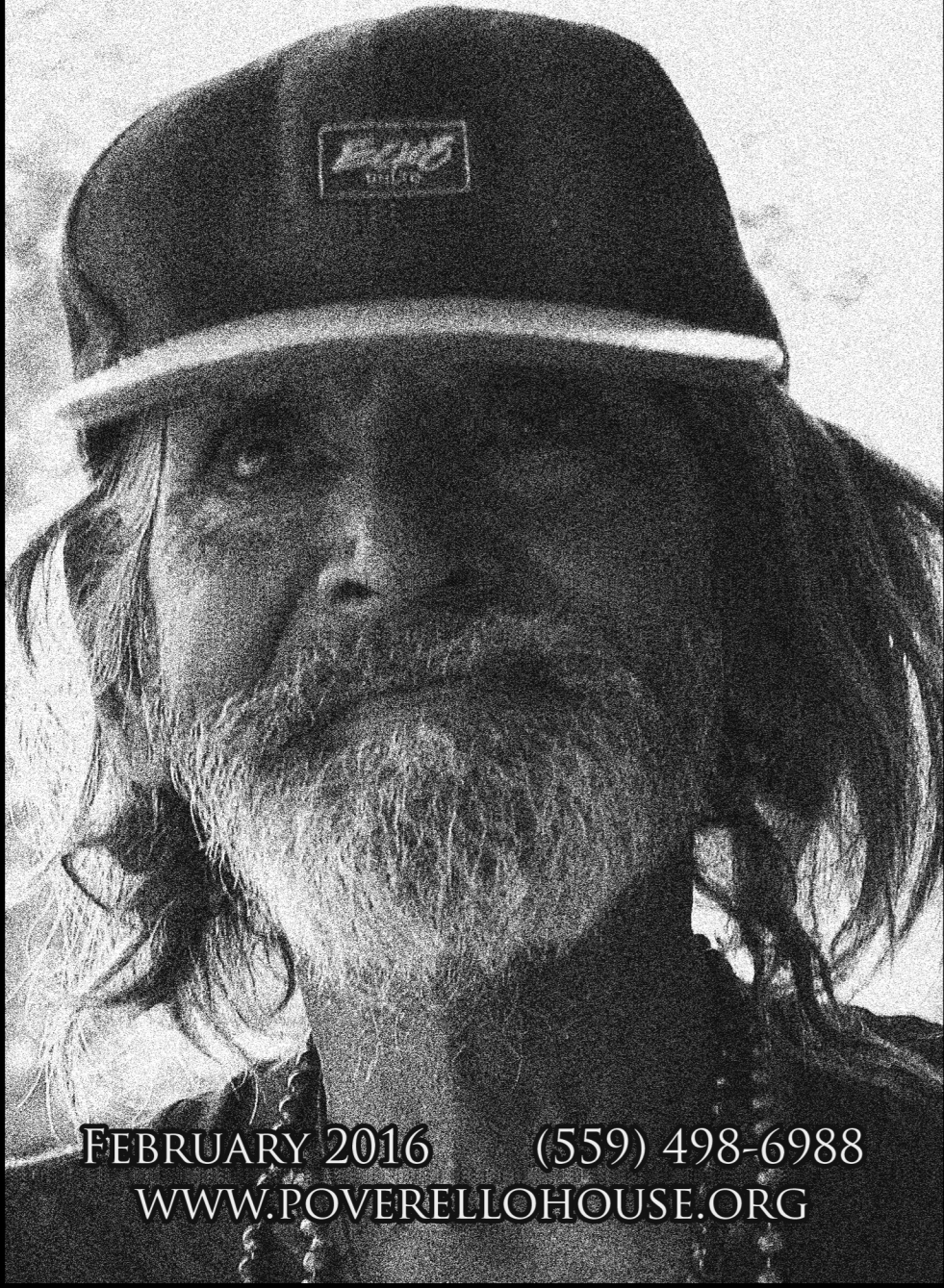


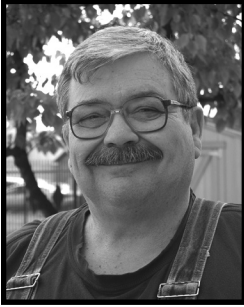
POVERELLO NEWS



FEBRUARY 2016

(559) 498-6988

WWW.POVERELLOHOUSE.ORG



There's an old saying attributed to St. Francis that goes like this: "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." Like many adages attributed to St. Francis, he may or may not have said this, but it captures the spirit of the kind of Christianity that inspired me and ultimately turned my life around.

When I hit rock bottom back in the 60s, I'm pretty sure I would have walked away from anyone trying to preach at me. Father Simon simply lived out his Christian beliefs on a daily basis, and that drew me to him, to his Poverello ministry, and finally to the church. That's not to say he didn't preach; he gave some amazing sermons at St. Boniface. However, the point is that I never would have entered that church and heard those sermons if he had tried to shove Christianity down my throat.

So I guess the Poverello way of conveying the gospel is similar to the quote attributed to St. Francis, or even what Alcoholics Anonymous says about spreading their message: "Attraction rather than promotion." We do offer church services on Sundays for anyone who wants to attend, led by some dedicated laypersons, but no one is required to go. All this is background for the story I'm about to tell.

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The story is about an encounter with one man, but similar incidents have taken place many times over the years. A guy I'll call Larry asked to meet with me. I sat down with him, and he described how he had experienced a very heartfelt conversion to Christianity, and now felt obligated to communicate his religious beliefs to the least of his brethren. Apparently, he had already been going around the area, praying with the homeless.

I'd like to say that he invited me to go with him and pray with the homeless, but it was more of a demand. Because he was so pushy, I didn't feel comfortable, but I figured that everyone down here needs prayer, so I agreed to go out with him. I told him I'd give him an hour. We mounted up in the Papa Mike Mobile, my golf cart, and started making the rounds.

What I noticed was that the pushiness that made me uncomfortable also made many of the homeless people uncomfortable, although, to be fair, a couple of them seemed to welcome the prayer on their behalf. When the hour was up, he wanted to keep going, but this old body of mine can only take so much schlepping around.

As we were about to part company, he invited himself over to my house for dinner. At that point, I became less passive. I have a soft spot for religious people, and can forgive a lot of inappropriate behavior that sometimes accompanies spiritual passion, but this was a bit much. I explained that Mary and I both have health problems and basically don't entertain guests for dinner.

Disappointed, he wasn't yet done. He asked if he could run our church services. I told him we already had people doing that, and that he was welcome to coordinate with them. I gave him the coordinator's telephone number, and we then said goodbye.

I later checked with the man who manages the services, and Larry never called him. Since then, I haven't seen Larry back here.

I believe he was sincere, but naïve, and certainly a little overbearing. When people come to help us, if they come with their own

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agenda, religious or otherwise, it can cause some real problems, and some unpleasant conflicts have taken place over the years. Sometimes they don't like our approach to helping the homeless, or occasionally they question or even balk at our rules. What they fail to see is that there are reasons for almost everything we do, and for what we don't allow to be done.

However, unless they *really* step out of line, we still welcome them. I think God has a reason for sending them to us, and maybe such people can reach someone I never could; or maybe they have a perspective that will help us see some things in a new light. The key for us is to be open and hospitable.

I hope Larry returns. It's easy for people with an enthusiastic new faith to become discouraged when faced with the reality and intractability of homelessness, but if they keep coming back, they often come to understand the "whys" of the way we work; sometimes they are so regular in their volunteering that they find a niche here and become important members of our Poverello family. And what family doesn't have a few disagreements?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fateful Decisions

Last December, Poverello House got what could be described as an early Christmas present—a big lump of coal, in a manner of speaking. It's a little embarrassing to talk about, because it might be seen as a failure on our part.

Three men in our drug rehabilitation program made the fateful decision to go out, score some drugs, and proceed to get high. In doing so, they not only ruined their chances in our program, but because they were court-ordered here, they will also be heading back to jail.

Their decision to use drugs was bad enough, but they had to take it one step further. They returned to Poverello under the influence and stole one of our vans.

This isn't the first time this has happened. The last occurrence was about twenty-five years ago. In a similar situation, one of our resident drivers managed to smoke some crack cocaine and then steal the van Mike McGarvin was using at the time. He kept it twenty-four hours. In what we can only imagine to be a fit of remorse the next day, he left the van in our back alley, threw the keys over the fence, and took off running.

Prior to that, around 1985, another driver took the station wagon we used for picking up donations. He went AWOL for an evening of heavy drinking. He really tied one on that night, because he parked the car, staggered his way to the detox facility out on Whitesbridge Road and checked himself in. He was in a drunken blackout, and never remembered where he left the car. A little over a year later, the police found it for us, parked behind a little out-of-the-way country grocery store, where, apparently, it had rested comfortably for that entire time.



Our most recent theft is a little reminder of what we're up against here. Did we fail these men, because they went out and used again? Perhaps an argument could be made to that effect, but in reality, these men failed the Poverello House staff, themselves, and their loved ones. By stealing the van, they also failed their fellow addicts in the program because they made it more difficult for those who remained to get to the meetings they need for their recovery.

Naturally, incidents like this are discouraging, but they are also revealing. What this situation underscores is that we humans often make stupid, unthinking, or evil decisions. When an addict with a track record of failure, personal catastrophe, and criminal acts

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decides to use drugs again, he is choosing to be morally and ethically irresponsible. He will always pay for it in the end, but sadly, so will a lot of other people: just ask anyone who has been the victim of a drug-fueled mugging, or someone whose house was burglarized to feed an addiction.

Fortunately, not everyone succumbs to the dark side of human nature. Recently, a frail old man came to us in desperate need of a coat. We sent him to our clothing warehouse to get something warm. As he was leaving the warehouse with a very nice jacket, a woman who was well over six feet tall and about twice the little man's weight came up to him and shouted, "That's my coat. Give it here!" She then started pummeling the old fellow and trying to pull the coat off of him.

Another woman, also very large, saw what was happening, and then ran up and pulled the attacker off of the poor old guy, who was now on the ground. She yelled, "Leave the old man alone!" and then proceeded to fight off the assailant on behalf of the victim.

In the end, it's important that our hearts not be poisoned by the hurtful or malicious acts of some people. We can't sell humanity short, because while there are plenty of people who act selfishly or cruelly, there are also plenty who try to love, nurture and protect others, even here on the streets. If we are to avoid despair, it's best to balance the nagging problem of evil with the hope that comes from the charitable, kind or even heroic acts of good people.

The Necessity of Self-Protection

Founder Mike McGarvin was watching over a meal in our dining room, when he saw a woman, who he knew to be schizophrenic, grab a silverware knife and start coming toward him with a disturbing look in her eye. Mike sensed immediately that in her

deranged mind, she viewed him as a threat, and was going to try to eliminate the threat.

Fortunately, a Poverello security guard saw what was happening and intervened, and with some help, removed the woman from the premises.

However, the incident demonstrates that if Mike can potentially be a victim, how much more are homeless people at risk?



With this in mind, last fall we offered a self-defense class to homeless women staying at Naomi's House. A self-defense instructor came and spent an afternoon teaching the women ways to be more aware of their surroundings, preventative measures to take before venturing out, and physical self-protection techniques.



It is our hope that none of the women ever have to use what they learned, but because of the nature of street life, they are more likely to encounter violence than someone who is not homeless. Self-

protection is often a neglected issue for homeless women, but because there is so much predation on the streets, we believe that it is very important that we address it.

February Wish List

Hams * Coffee * Copy paper

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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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.