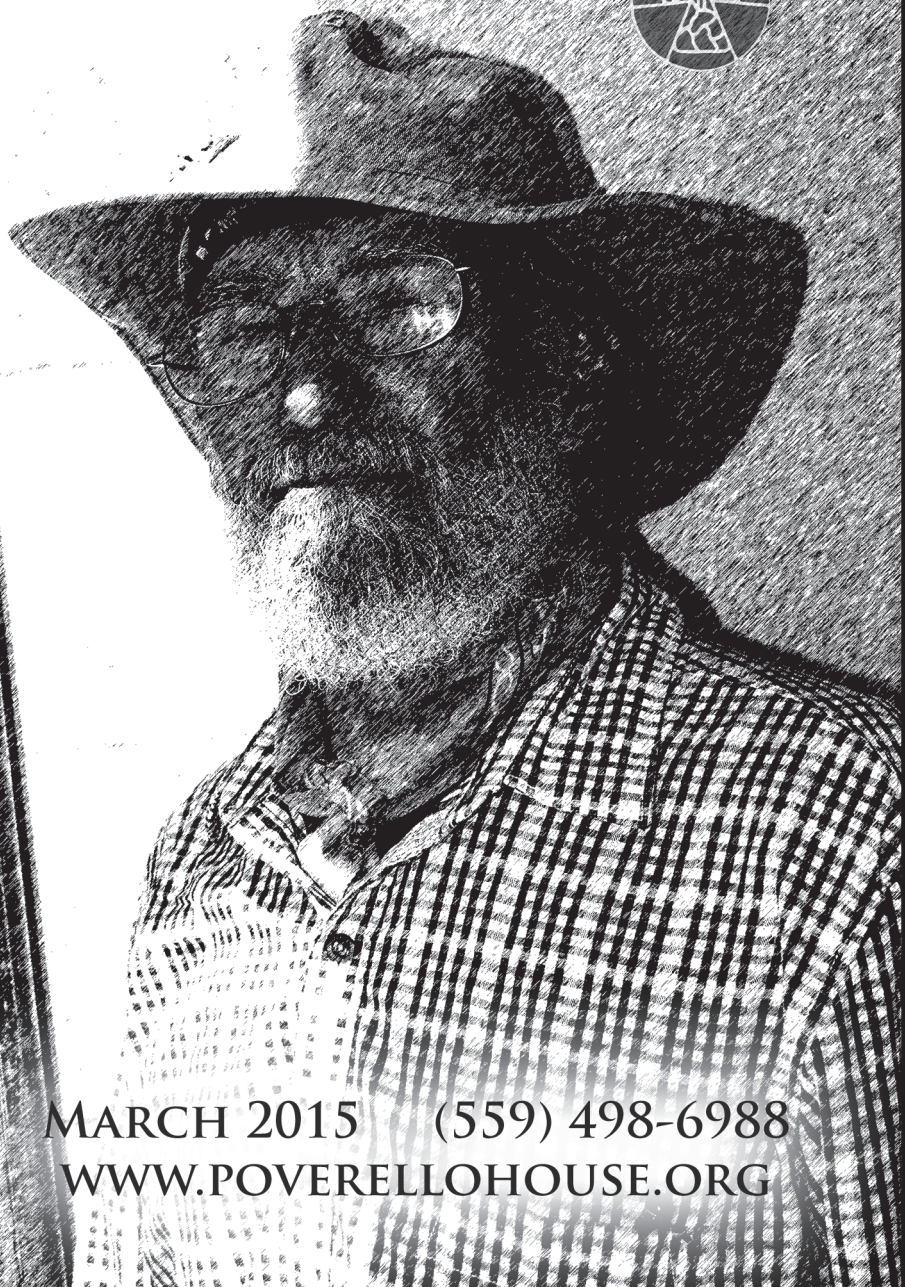


POVERELLO NEWS



MARCH 2015 (559) 498-6988
WWW.POVERELLOHOUSE.ORG



I've never been much of a sports fan—I've always been a *football* fan. Being a big, ungainly kid, football provided me with camaraderie, a sense of purpose and a physical outlet for my pent-up anger. After I was done playing in junior college, I became a devoted fan of the 49ers, the team in my adopted town of San Francisco.

Although I knew pretty much everything there is to know about football, I was ignorant about any other sports. I haven't given this fact much thought until I recently saw a documentary about Wille Mays. It took me back to a memory from my early days at the San Francisco Poverello House.

Father Simon, who ran the San Francisco Poverello, was a baseball nut. Someone gave him a couple of tickets to a Giants game, and he asked me if I'd like to go with him. I had no interest in baseball, but I liked the idea of spending a little time outside of the Poverello with Father Simon.

When we got to the stadium, we discovered that these were tickets for some great seats, right at first base. The game began, and it wasn't long before I was getting bored. No tackling, no breaking bones, just hitting a ball with a stick and a bunch of guys chasing it.

I don't know if Father Simon sensed my boredom, but at some point he nudged me and said, "See number 24? Keep an eye on him. He's a very gifted baseball player. He does it all, and does it all very well."

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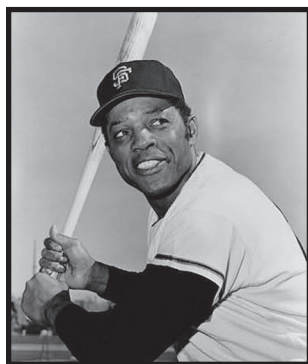
So I watched number 24, and after awhile, the game wasn't so boring. I began to see why Father Simon admired him so much. This guy was great at everything he did in the game. It was obvious that he was not only gifted, but also completely focused on the task at hand. At one point, when the Giants were in the outfield, a batter hit the ball high into center field. It seemed impossible that someone could get to it. I asked Father Simon, "Will he catch it?" With assured nonchalance, Simon said, "Oh, yeah."

Father Simon told me his name, but it didn't mean much to me. It wasn't until years later that I found out that I was watching a legend—Willie Mays.

In the documentary, Mays said that his motivation was always the same: he loved baseball. He didn't play primarily for the money, or the fame, but simply because he knew he was talented, and he loved the game and loved using his talents to do what he apparently was born to do.

Another time, an old German priest (whose name now escapes me) was given tickets and invited me to the opera to see Verdi's *Aida*. Once again, we got some great seats. Anyway, it began, and of course I couldn't understand anything going on, but I was interested in one aspect of the opera presentation. I leaned over to the priest and asked, "Father, where do they hide the microphones?", which made the old German chuckle. Having been to many 60s concerts with amplified rock 'n roll music, it was unimaginable to me that human voices could be projected so forcefully without the aid of electronics.

The point of these stories is that by the time I was in my 20s, I was still ignorant and isolated. My world had, prior to discovering the San Francisco Poverello, revolved around drinking, fighting, and doing drugs. Those Franciscan priests opened my eyes to worlds I couldn't imagine, both spiritually and culturally. These are fond memories, and I will always be grateful for those experiences that expanded my horizons.



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Here at the Fresno Poverello, we've often tried to do the same thing. Homelessness and addiction lead to limited, stultifying lives that often revolve around the two-block area between Poverello and the Fresno Rescue Mission. We've taken people on various outings including barbeques, volleyball games, fishing, museums, the

Central Coast, Fresno Grizzly games, restaurants, and even cross country skiing. Inevitably on one of these outings, there will be someone along who will be experiencing what we are offering for the first time. For example, when we went cross country skiing, a couple of men didn't ski, but instead simply made snowmen and threw snow-

balls at each other. Adults in their late 20s, they had never seen or touched snow before.

We don't have the expectation that such excursions will be life-changing. Our main hope is that the outings will be a thread in a tapestry of recovery that we are slowly trying to weave. If

we can help someone get a glimpse of the great big world beyond F Street, maybe that person will be able to hope for something better than the misery that is so familiar, and in some ways, comfortable.

Mike



The Many Victims of Homelessness

When people think about the tragedy of homelessness, they mostly visualize the misery that the homeless endure: poverty, weather extremes, threats of violence, and sleeping in deplorable conditions. All of that is sad and true. However, few stop to consider the widespread societal impact of homelessness.

As we've written many times, homelessness does not occur in a vacuum. It bears repeating that mental illness and addiction are the primary causative factors in today's homeless problem.

Mentally ill people often do irrational, and sometimes destructive things. Addicts' craving for drugs drives them to commit illegal activities to fund their insatiable habits. These actions are corrosive to the community at large.

Recently, we spoke with the owners of a downtown business. We deal with this business regularly for a variety of services. We were shocked to walk in one morning and find the carpets stained, holes drilled in the walls, and portable blowers running.

The business had been the victim of an attempted theft, which ultimately resulted in \$60,000 of damage to the building. In the middle of the night, someone tried to steal the anti-siphon valve off the building's water main, only to be greeted with gushing water. The thief abandoned his quest, but the water continued to run, backing up into the building. As the business was closed until the morning, the water ran all night, and destroyed carpets, floors and walls.

The owners then went on to tell us about the "war zone" that their industrial neighborhood had become. The street lights were out for months because thieves had stripped the copper wire from them. The business has also been victimized by a mentally ill man who likes to throw concrete chunks through the windows. He once left a grocery cart full of concrete pieces in the middle of the darkened street. One of the owners just happened to spot it and move it before a car hit it.

They pointed out other thefts in the vicinity. The business across the street had all of its air conditioning units stolen. The electrical

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panel at the same business that was torn apart for wire. The business on the opposite corner, in spite of a wrought iron fence around the parking lot, was victimized by a man with a cordless reciprocating saw, who, in broad daylight, cut the catalytic converters off employees' cars.

The driving forces behind these crimes are the dual dilemmas of mentally unbalanced people wandering the streets, coupled with the addict's need to find revenue to support his addiction. Eventually, the cost of doing business in the downtown area might prove to be too high for these companies and their employees. If they fold, or move elsewhere, it will be a triumph for the forces of chaos and decay.

There are laws and policies that create an atmosphere wherein legitimate industry becomes prey to the homeless. Unintended consequences of "compassionate" legislation, such as deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, have led to seriously impaired people, who can be a danger to themselves and others, left to fend for themselves out on the streets. Likewise, "compassionate" laws that punish crime with mere citations allow addicts to wantonly steal, unimpeded by any significant consequence. The result is honest businessmen and women having their livelihoods, and sometimes their lives, threatened by homeless people.

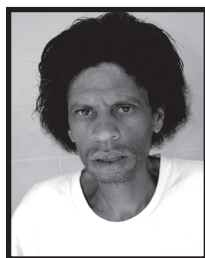
We need to be wise in how we work to help people, what laws we vote for, and the manner in which we practice compassion. Sometimes the most charitable act is spontaneous and simple; at other times, it is complex, and we can discover that what we thought to be kindhearted is instead making a problem worse.

Mother Teresa said, "Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you." We believe this at Poverello House. Many think that this is a dangerously simplistic approach to a huge social problem. We have discovered, however, that aiding one addict on the road to recovery, or helping stabilize one mentally ill person by getting him access to treatment and housing, can make drastic and immediate improvements in the community. That's one less person who will be committing countless crimes, one less person using and abusing chari-

table resources, and one less person so mired in hopelessness that he feels he has nothing to lose.

Realistically, you cannot change most social problems on a large scale if they are caused by peoples' dysfunctional minds or withered souls. You can level a neighborhood and build all new houses, dump billions into trying to improve people's lives, but, in the end, if those people don't experience spiritual, psychological and emotional healing, all you've done is relocate the problem.

At Poverello, our main hope is to bring healing to people with deep wounds, wounds that sometimes compel them to commit criminal acts. We start in the only way we can: with the people nearest us, out there on F Street, one at a time.



Traditional Irish Meal for the Homeless

On March 17th, when everyone becomes Irish for a day, Poverello will be serving its annual St. Patrick's Day meal of corned beef and cabbage. Mike McGarvin, Founder/Fellowship Director and expert Irishman, will bestir himself to taste-test the meal to ensure that it is sufficiently Gaelic.

If you'd like to help us provide this festive meal, you can donate corned beef, head of cabbage, or whole potatoes. Of course, all other food items, Irish or not, are also welcomed every day. For more information on donating food or other goods, please call us at (559) 498-6988.

March Wish List

Corned beef * Cabbage * Potatoes * Coffee * Coffee creamer
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 that believes in the dignity of every human being. Our mission is to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way, to feed the hungry, offer focused rehabilitation programs, temporary shelter, medical, dental and other basic services to the poor, the homeless, and the disadvantaged unconditionally, without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex or disability, through Providential and community support. We have been operating since 1973 and are governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of local volunteer business 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; and through United Way. 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.



United Way of Fresno County
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