



St. Francis Soup Kitchen

134 E. Church St., Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Diane and Jim McVety www.stfrancissoupkitchenjax.org cricketjd@comcast.net

October 31, 2014

There's a violence of poverty that we sometimes witness and experience. It comes out of unfathomable lives that many of our customers endure. Think of it, being lonely, unloved, having no one, experiencing the worst in being rejected, scorned and unwanted. For some their suffering demands an escape which so many find in drugs and alcohol which may have gotten them to where they are, the quick acting antidote to their fears and anger leaving them spiritually bankrupt. Dealing with people suffering from these terrible circumstances, the anguish over a meal, shelter, clothing, warmth, fellowship, can be daunting.

But we continue to serve since we believe this is what Our Lord meant in Mathew 25:31-36. Jesus walked with the "least of these", people who most of society treats as outcasts, rejects, worthless, bums who might be disheveled, vagrants to be avoided. There are some, but most of our customers do not fit that description. Even so we are all children of God.

There are arguments, panhandling, dirty restrooms, spills, mop ups, excessive demands, interventions and other aspects of the Kitchen's operations. It's challenging, time consuming, exhausting, costly and stressful. But very worth all the effort!

Our rewards are in the customers' smiles, their expressions of appreciation. So often they come to us without anything to eat for the day, without supplies for the week, without a hospitable place to take a break from it all. They know, as we do, that what the Kitchen does is in accord with Our Lord's mandate.

There are times when we sense Christ in the breadline. There are times when we sense that if there were soup kitchens in Jesus' time, He would have stood in line. These are His people, both sides of the table. Eichenberg had it right in his renowned drawings on the Last Supper and Christ in the Breadlines.

When children enter our dining room, we do all we can to make them smile with a "high five", a bag of candy, a stuffed animal, books, toys. Their frowns and stares quickly dissipate. They are especially welcomed with enthusiasm and affection. Smiles are infectious on both the children and volunteers and those around them. It brightens the room.

So many of our customers are familiar acquaintances. They reciprocate our affection and compassion. If they have a special request, we try to meet it. If we can't, the conversation often continues. We are interested in them and they are interested in us. The bonds of friendship are fleeting but they are real.

It's a constant source of amazement when we see what the Kitchen provides, not only a good nourishing meal but canned goods, bakery items, clothes, shoes, toiletries, reading glasses, kids' treats and so on. For a relatively unknown operation powered strictly by volunteers one wonders how it all happens until that prayer of gratitude at the end of the day. Then we remember!

We rely on youth groups, church groups from various denominations, U.S. Navy personnel, local college groups, and our mainstay volunteers and individuals who come in motivated by their good spirit and a desire to give back by serving the neediest. The customers benefit but so too do the volunteers. Here's an extract of a letter we received from a student which represents remarks often made by our young volunteers: "In the four years that I spent volunteering alongside you at the Saint Francis Soup Kitchen, I remember you thanking me many times, yet I don't feel like I've ever thanked you... for the invaluable service that you provide each day the Soup Kitchen operates. You serve poor and homeless people of Jacksonville with food and hospitality but you also serve people like me by leading us in service that we would be unable to do by ourselves.... I probably would never have set foot in a soup kitchen, and think of how much I have changed for the better because I did so!...."

Our benefactors provide us with the resources to re-distribute all that is received into the hands of those who are without, or to buy items needed to operate each week, or the maintenance of all the equipment. People walk in with bags of clothes which we sort, or recycled grocery bags, or canned goods. You'll hear us say "Yes, thank you" to just about everything.

On occasion a customer will pull out a dollar as a contribution. Believe us, it's hard to accept but we do because it is his wish and gesture of appreciation. We receive monetary donations in small and bigger amounts. They all get put to the best use for our customers. Here's an example of outreach that always moves us: "Our second grade students brought in 100 pennies each on the 100th day of school. We counted them and did various math activities with them. Then we rolled them.... We took the pennies to the bank and had a check made out to your charity.... As a service project, we are donating this money... in order to help people in need...."!

We grow weary, some of our weariness is age related and some related to the deep emotional and spiritual impact on us each week. When we get a letter like the above,

or we get a remark from a volunteer or an expression of appreciation from a customer, our weariness is abated. But then there's next week...!

Please continue to stand with us in this humble ministry. Sometimes people will ask what they can do to help. Money is always greatly appreciated and miserly spent to its best use. But there are many items we are always need. So we are including a list. Your help with these will be greatly appreciated. They can be dropped off any Friday or Saturday morning, or any weekday at the Catholic Charities office next door. You can see by the numbers on the first page that the mission is growing, but only by the participation and support of many, many groups and individuals like yourself.

Sanctity begins with works of love which are works of peace!

PRAY FOR PEACE

Thank you