



## St. Francis Soup Kitchen

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### Newsletter November, 2016

#### TO THE SOUP KITCHEN FAMILY;

We salute you. You have brought a smile to our Lord, to your heart and to your soul through serving the poorest. It makes no difference in what capacity, be it deliveries, sorting clothes, food drives, meal prep, busing, crowd control, clean up, organizing the dining room, kitchen, closet or pantry distributions. You have contributed in your way and that is why we salute you. To give up your time and apply your talent means you are all people of good spirit. Your reward is in your efforts, in our appreciation and in the gratitude of the customers.

Our benefactors are a very special group. They keep the Kitchen afloat. We have always seemed to have enough. No one has ever been turned away from a meal. Even the unruly are served at the door. The Kitchen's respect and appreciation for your generosity is partially reflected in the manner in which donations are so frugally applied.

Very often we hear volunteers, particularly the young, exclaim what a great experience they have had, "I had no idea!" New volunteers come in with some reserve, not quite sure what they got themselves into. And, they leave fully charged and pleased with themselves. As tired and worn out as they can be. Fr. Ho Lung, Missionaries of the Poor, is often quoted as saying, "the service of the poor is the path to happiness."

#### TO OUR CUSTOMERS, WE THANK YOU

Week in, week out, month after month, you come in burdened with a most insecure, difficult life, speckled with loneliness and indifference, little rest, no home, job, family, relationships, not feeling valued, blocked mobility, lots of estrangement, trapped, seeking community which we all need, congregating with your impoverished brothers and sisters collectively without a solution.

We can barely imagine the torrid need for relief. Some find it through church affiliations, others in local parks where artificial “feel good” antidotes provide relief and escape. We all should know where that can lead, a bottomless pit.

Many customers are most gracious, coming to the Kitchen window to express their appreciation, thanking the servers, complementing the meal or the stew, the salad and the range of desserts. All leave with something, a loaf of bread, a bag of canned goods, a box of donuts, clean socks, dry shirt, and a volunteer’s smile. Frequently, we’re told the Kitchen has the best food and service.

Maybe that’s why Jose goes to the lengths that he does to come to our place. Jose lives in Baldwin. He get up at 2 A.M., rides his bike to Commonwealth Avenue, hops a bus and comes from the station to get an early place on line.

The grandparents regularly bring their grandchildren who are more interested in the bag of candy they receive. What fun it is to be greeted by a hug. All of us were deeply moved when a grandma walked in with eight children. The kids were clean, well dressed and very orderly. Grandma told them to go wash their hands. No protest, off they went. Finish your meal, then dessert, they did; clean your place, they did. It was wonderful to witness, brought a tear to our eye as we tried to compliment grandma.

There was a call we answered from another grandma, very distressed, who had just sent her brood off to school. She has no money, no transportation and one can of spaghetti left in the cupboard. The Kitchen delivered a large case of canned goods, pasta, rice, sauce and other items to her “shotgun” house in the hood. You can imagine her appreciation for the soup kitchen.

We do not judge. We serve all comers. The only requirement for entrance is civility. But, we understand why that may be difficult for some. So, we bring their lunch and fill other requests at the entrance door.

## CAUSES

People without a regular dwelling, or street people, or those in shelters, or those inadequately housed get into these circumstances from lack of worth, domestic problems, relationship breakdowns, mental disorders, addiction, prison release, eviction or just plain dumb luck.

## PROBLEMS

Many people have problems with personal security, safekeeping possessing hygiene and clothing, food storage, a mailing address, permanent contacts, rejection, hostility, health and dental care, and no access to banking. They are the powerless, the marginalized, the

ineffective, without influence, yet it is amazing the most common one word response to “How are you?” is “Blessed!”..... We can learn much from this segment of our community.

#### MISSIONARIES OF THE POOR (M. O. P.)

There has been communication between our beloved Bishop Estevez and Father Ho Lung, M.O.P. And we believe an invitation has been extended to M.O.P. to come to our diocese and, in particular, to Jacksonville, to extend M.O.P.’s mission. The missionaries spend most of their time comforting the afflicted, giving witness to the joy obtainable through the love of Jesus Christ. By this witness, the missionaries spend much of the rest of their time afflicting the comfortable. There are over 60 references in Holy Scriptures to serving the poor. In so many ways the Gospel forever takes away our right to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving.

But, we’re not too good at doing this as can be felt in the truth of a humorist’s observation that “it ain’t no disgrace to be poor, but it might as well be.” If we could only live our lives by demonstrating that we are rich by what we give and poor by what we refuse. This is how the M.O.P. live. Their calling, and they work throughout their global apostolates, demonstrate their acknowledgement and commitment to the neediest. Their work broadcasts the scriptural references to serving the poor. We know God is pleased and we pray it is God’s pleasure and will to bring M.O.P. to Jacksonville and to St. Francis Soup Kitchen. See [www.missionariesofthepoor.org](http://www.missionariesofthepoor.org)

#### DIANE AND JIM

When our friendship began, it was fun, lots to do, many friends and activities. After a few years, we seemed to enter into a period of discernment, individually and together without giving the process much voice. Later, on realizing what we were doing was a joint engagement with quite a lot of commonality. St. Ignatius seemed to have a role to play. Informally, albeit to some extent unwittingly, we were following the Ignatian guidelines as our framework. While young people come in, and there are a few minutes to visit, Jim might ask, “what are you plans for the future?” Frequently they answer that they’re not sure yet; a garden to plant the seeds of discernment. So, we set out the guidelines and framework that we used in the hope that these young adults and any other age groups might benefit like we did from St. Ignatius’ scholarly discourse.

These guidelines involve openness, generosity, courage, interior freedom, prayerful reflection and getting our priorities straight. The framework involved identifying the decisions to be made, formulating the issues in a positive way, prayer for openness and freedom from addictions, and pre-judgements, research and the gathering of information, prayerful evaluation of the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, experiencing consolation, enthusiasm, joy, hope, trust, courage, deepened faith and confidence while confirming our

decisions to join together to serve the poor and the addicted. We each had our own timeline through these guidelines and formation of our individual framework.

And finally, to live well with our decisions, which, we feel we have. Sometime during the month of November, 2016 we will have arranged or participated in serving 500,000 or more lunches, the distribution of close to one million pounds of commodities and baked goods, an aggregate of well more than 300,000 hours of the Kitchen volunteers' services, accommodating over 40,000 requests for clothing and personal items, countless reading glasses, books, etc.

Through the years that Diane has volunteered at Wolfson's Children's Hospital and the years Jim has counselled at Gateway Community Services and, particularly, the countless hours dedicated to stabilizing, improving and developing St. Francis Soup Kitchen and its three distinct operations all with compassion, we have reaped truly remarkable rewards. We have met amazing people in the full circumference of life in the Kitchen's three distinct centers. We have met men and women who have walked the walk demonstrating St. Paul's fruits of the Spirit (5 Gal. 22-23). If we were to list each fruit and name the names, the volume of this good-will message would be overbearing even more than it is. We are talking about people of compassion and good spirit who consistently perform little acts of kindness without a hook in it for themselves. That's love!

We have been honored and blessed to make the acquaintance of many members of the military services. Our hats are off to the U.S. Navy for its community service commitment. College students, youth group members and their ministers, retirees, the medical and legal professions, the Knights of Columbus, Order of Malta, retirees from various fields, young people who simply want the experience and give contribute to the community. Individually you are exceptional; collectively, you have overwhelmed us with your concern, support, time, talent and treasure. You have borne witness, pronounced and preached the Gospel in volumes that have caused us to lose our breath at times.

We came as strangers, found you and you became our family!

The customers are young, old, gracious and grumpy, social and silent, the hygienic and otherwise, polite and rude, demanding and accepting, appreciative and not, so on and so forth. The customer profile is indescribable since it covers all aspects of humanity, cloaked in unmet basic needs, the underprivileged, the abused, the criminal, the struggling, the abandoned, the nicked and dimed. It's been rather fascinating witnessing, close up, the emotional, spiritual and physical challenges, all the while wondering how they do it.

Now after all these years, our efforts have taken their toll and we need to relinquish some of our responsibilities. We are not separating; that would be like leaving family. But we have been praying for people or groups to come in and take over the production, the heavy lifting. For several years we have sought successors. People have passed through and passed on. As

time has moved on, we didn't think our prayers would be answered almost to the point of exasperation.

But, Hallelujah! The Missionaries of the Poor

We can only conclude the Holy Spirit once again lifts the merits of the Kitchen and applauds the efforts of the Kitchen's volunteers by highlighting the prospect of a missionary order coming in and assuming a role that will assure the Kitchen's continuation. Bishop Estevez and Fr. Ho Lung, M.O.P., have corresponded and both have explored the way for M.O.P. to come to the Diocese of St. Augustine, work with the Soup Kitchen, and engage in missionary activities in Jacksonville such service to the neediest and most vulnerable people in our community. The preliminary plan is to start with a presence and then build an apostolate in many respects like the 19 apostolates that MOP maintains though out many parts of the world. This is a remarkable pace of development since it was less than 20 years ago that the Holy See gave formal recognition of the Missionaries of the Poor as a Religious Institute of Diocesan Right, obtaining Pontifical Recognition of the Missionaries of the Poor as a Religious Institute of Pontifical Right.

We are excited. The missionaries we have met are truly wonderful men of the highest caliber, faithful, industrious, compassionate, and eager to do God's will in the service of the poor and neediest. The Kitchen's assets are in good working order, and the resources are more than adequate. The Kitchen enjoys a good reputation and the good will of both sides of the table. It's a strong viable venue for the missionaries to build on and to extend the Kitchen's mission in accordance with the Order's Constitutions. We are looking forward to these changes in mid- year of 2017.

Diane and Jim have not sought publicity or fanfare for our efforts. Our commitment simply reflects the importance of service to the poor. So we join all our volunteers, the Kitchen family, who reflect the same commitment. Hopefully we will fade in to the background slowly.

"We are unprofitable servants. We have done what we were obliged to do" (Luke, 17:10)

Our plan is to work closely with M.O.P. for as long as it takes to familiarize them with the Kitchen operations, all the little systems and methods and resources which make the Kitchen a viable presence in the community. Even then, we hope to stay active; after all, you are family.

God Bless and Thank You!

Peace and Love

Diane and Jim