

Taking Action for the Poor and Hungry

In 1981, Martha's Kitchen opened its doors to the poor at Sacred Heart Church in San Jose, Calif. I was working at a homeless shelter in 1985 for three years when Louise Benson, foundress, asked me to consider directing the Kitchen. "No thank you, I have a job," I said. But then who would've known I'd resign from the shelter within a year. I was visiting family in Hawai'i when I got a pressing call from the Kitchen to reconsider. I lost no time asking Mother Mary for help, since I knew nothing about soup kitchens. I accepted the position and became its 5th director in six years. "What chance for longevity did I have with such a short running record of previous directors?" I thought. "God had it all figured out."

I wasted no time putting to work the organizational, typing, journalistic and fundraising skills I had learned from teaching. However, nothing, nothing prepared me for what came next-- scouring dumpsters of wholesale-grocer's, salvaging discarded cases of fruits and veggies; collecting day-old doughnuts, bread, sweet rolls, from bakeries or picking items from truck farms on weekends.

Seeing the ugliness of poverty suffered by the kids is especially heart wrenching. One rainy afternoon from my second floor office, I spied a delivery truck slowly pulling out. What I saw made my eyes well up with tears and still today as I write this. Huddled together in the torrential rain was a woman and a shivering little girl-- barefooted. I immediately called the Kitchen for someone to get the mother and child under cover and open the doors early to the wet waiting crowd.

Serving the hungry poor brings you down to yourself: Am I helping them? Yes, they're being fed? Is this really God's work? You couldn't convince me otherwise. Am I a changed person? I would find the answer for the next 17 years, working with over 120 volunteers a day, morning and evening shifts: truckers, gleaners, sorters, cutters, washers, cooks, servers, cleaners, gardeners, and prayer groups. It's a resounding "yes."

There's no "preferential option" to consider. There's a "need" to fill. Taking action is better than meetings to discuss strategies. Act.

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