



St. Francis Soup Kitchen

www.stfrancissoupkitchenjax.org

2010 Newsletter

Hunger is defined as an uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food

Tattered may be described as a person wearing torn, ragged clothes;
A ragamuffin without a smile

Powerless may be defined as an inability or incapacity to act or influence

Poverty is an impotence which envelopes the hungry, the tattered, the powerless

Thanks to you, our supporters, volunteers, benefactors and prayerful, the Soup Kitchen continues to extend a helping hand to the people who exist in the four groupings above, the neediest and poorest in our community, in an attempt to alleviate some of their discomfort and anguish.

A man slept the night outside the Kitchen in the parking lot to make sure he would get an early ticket to the clothes closet. During the night the temperature dropped in to the low 40's. When we arrived before dawn, he was shivering in the cold. He had a tattered blanket over his tee shirt and shorts. He was sixth in line for the closet, and left with a sweatshirt, jacket and pants, expressing his gratitude which we extend to you, our providers.

Recently, a man complimented Diane on the soup (which is more like a stew). Diane invited him to go up and get a refill. He got so excited, telling Diane that he hadn't had a meal in 3 days. Hard to believe, but we hear this frequently.

LeRoy let his license expire in 2007, since he did not have a car and no prospects for one, and hadn't driven in years. Hence no need to spend his few dollars on a license renewal. The old license would continue to do as a photo I.D. Recently the rules changed. Now, you have to have a current photo I. D. to gain access to the merest of opportunities, like work on clean up squads at football stadiums. This is what LeRoy wanted to do; but, he couldn't get hired because he didn't have a current photo I.D. To get one in the form of a license renewal, LeRoy was told he needed an official copy of his birth certificate from the state he was born in. But, he couldn't get a birth certificate without a current official photo I.D.. LeRoy found himself powerless to get a birth certificate so he could get a current photo I.D. so he could get work. The Soup Kitchen stepped in to help and solve LeRoy's dilemma.

A few weeks ago a woman and her son came in. It was the boy's fourth birthday that day. We always like to make a fuss for children and especially for birthdays. A cupcake was found, a birthday candle was lit. The volunteers gathered 'round and sang a rousing version of Happy Birthday. Mom was in tears as were several volunteers. We found many extra treats for them both and they left with big smiles!

An older man came in who was walking with a cane and barely able to make it to the table for lunch. He pointed to his shoes which were much too small and had the heels folded down to fit him. He asked for another pair, but we had none for him. The next week he returned with the same shoes and this time we had his size. He was so grateful, he kept saying, "God Bless you!"

Several months ago an older man finished his lunch and came to talk with one of the volunteers. He was obviously intoxicated and almost in tears. He was recently out of work, homeless, dirty, and not feeling well, giving a list of ailments. He said, "I may as well kill myself, it's hopeless." The volunteer talked with him quite a while and he asked her to pray with him. A few weeks later the same man returned and spoke with that same volunteer. He was sober,

clean, and had a place to live! He said "I want to thank you for caring, you don't know how much that meant."

Each week we witness the hungry, the tattered, the powerless often in the ravishes of drugs and alcohol. These are all memorable situations. Most of the stories are very dramatic, and so many of the problems are overwhelming. We can't solve the problems, which is so often frustrating, but it's a blessing to be able to provide some alleviation, albeit temporary.

The Soup Kitchen continues to participate in the U.S.D.A./TEFAP food surplus program administered by Second Harvest Food Bank. The program allows us to weekly distribute many hundreds of pounds of canned goods, meats, and other items to our customers and, in many cases, the members of their households. Waste Not Want Not in Orange Park, Publix, and Gleaners Dispatch continue to help us serve bread and baked goods each week.

As you would expect, given the times, our local economy, the high unemployment rate, the high rate of under-employed, the increasing disintegration of the family unit, the rising poverty rate, our numbers are increasing as well. Sometimes we feel we are at the breaking point, at our capacity. But The Lord provides.

Recently we expressed a desire to make a special Christmas distribution of jeans and sneakers which are always in great demand and in short supply. In fact the clothes closet volunteers, our unheralded heroes, are often exasperated by the countless requests for pants and foot wear which the volunteers can't fill.

But our wishes were heard and The Order of Malta has provided us with the jeans and the means to make the Christmas distribution. We are excited! While preparing the meal on a Friday in October, the kitchen group listened to our hopes. Mike Zambetti suggested the Order of Malta as a resource and mentioned Jerry Weedon as a starting point. Jerry and his wife, Cathy, are among our regular Saturday volunteers. We discussed our needs and wishes with Jerry who, in turn, took the initiative. In short order we've been put in a position to make this extraordinary distribution at Christmas time. Thanks to Jack Demetree for his leadership in this campaign by

promptly providing us with 75 pairs of jeans. The Order of Malta has also given us the funds we need to purchase over 75 pairs of sneakers. Truly, we are blessed by their generosity allowing us to extend a Christmas blessing to many of our community's neediest. The local members of The Order of Malta who have stepped up reflect Our Lord's Beatitude:

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Throughout the year so many people have committed their time, talent and treasure to the Soup Kitchen without fanfare. In fact our prime benefactors continue their support anonymously.

On our side of the Kitchen's tables, we see teenagers, college students, members of the military, parishioners and youth groups, and men and women from all walks of life demonstrate their good spirits by reaching out, at times putting up with all sorts of aggravation in a sometimes intense atmosphere in our dining room.

These are the people Our Lord blessed in the Beatitude. Jesus did not judge how the poor and the outcastes got that way, or even why they remained that way. He responded directly to them in their need. At times, He addressed the structures that contributed to their condition. And he blessed those like our volunteers who are poor in spirit to help.

On the customers' side of the tables, we see the outcastes, the rejected, the lonely, the physically and mentally displaced, the undereducated, the addicted, the unwanted, and the community's poorest of the poor. Still, we see their fortitude, their perseverance, their humanness, and their faith. So often, you hear "I'm blessed".

Over the years we've gotten to know many of the customers, listening to their stories. Each Saturday it's like a living drama, witnessing Christ in the breadline, sensing a relief in the needy, and a grateful benevolence in the volunteers. Truly the Holy Spirit watches over the place, and continues to supply us with the means to do what the gospel teaches about tending to the least of our brothers and sisters. And so we will continue with your help.

THANKS TO ALL OF YOU
FOR KEEPING THE DOORS OPEN