



MORE THAN A HOT MEAL

Sharing God's Bounty feeds souls

BY LYNETTE MAGNINO | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GERMAN

Without fail, the Sharing God's Bounty ministry dishes up nutritious meals every Tuesday evening as it has since January 1983 – almost 40 years. The hungry, the “unhoused,” and, very often, the hopeless from all points throughout the Arden-Arcade area of Sacramento, come to St. Philomene School gym to assuage their hunger. In truth, there's a lot more going on.

■ Sacramento Superior Court Judge Jim Mize is one of the original founders of Sharing God's Bounty. Since 1983, there have been about 5,000 volunteers and more than one million guests served.

Sacramento Superior Court Judge Jim Mize, one of the original founders, gives insight into how food is somewhat of a side dish and the real nourishment comes from the bounty of friendship, kindness and service.

“First, they’re coming here because they don’t have a choice,” Jim notes, stating that “if they have enough money to eat at home, they do.” Often there is no money. Maybe instead of a home, they have a car. Guests line up in the cold and the rain during the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 because hunger hurts. But Jim surmises more.

“People come for the humanity,” he says, even as Sharing God’s Bounty’s normal hospitality protocol is severely disrupted due to the pandemic.

“It obviously is a horrible thing,” he complains, citing the ministry’s necessary adaptation to takeout meal distribution rather than a served, sit-down hot meal inside. His voice echoes of frustration because “we still have hungry people.” Bounty continues to accommodate people with “very nutritious meals and lots of protein, vegetables and salad” for pickup. But the indispensable piece – the beautiful, humanity piece – suffers now as Bounty navigates the ups and downs of health and safety during this unprecedented time.

Jim hails the nature of the ministry and tells how, before the pandemic, guests typically “sit down with their friends or relatives or people they meet and enjoy their meal together.” He describes a compassionate setting where volunteers serve guests restaurant-style, bringing food and drinks. Time stands still as guests leave their worries and sadness outside in favor of

moments of dignity inside.

Volunteer Lynne Bowling agrees. As a witness to Bounty’s holistic and curative effects for the past eight years, she thinks about what transpires in those hallowed spaces. “I see gratefulness,” she explains, describing how guests appreciate how they are acknowledged and respected. “I see dignity, hopefulness and truly the eyes of Jesus looking back at me,” she adds.

“We totally emphasize this is a family and they are our brothers and sisters,” Jim says, distinguishing “a ministry of providing dignity and along with dignity we offer a hot meal.”

AN OPEN HEART MATTERS

The long legacy and spirit of Bounty can be traced back to founders Jackie Lane, Jeannie Bastion and Jim, who evolved something real over the decades. Jackie and Jeannie are now deceased but Jim lovingly shares how their knack for catering allowed Bounty to open its doors to 40 souls that cold January in 1983, turning goodness and charity into tangible, palpable dignity for those in need.

Jim describes himself as “a pretty good organizer and a talker” and, together, the founding team moved through the first 10 years eventually transforming Bounty into a multi-layered ministry. Volunteers rotate through various jobs handling the cooking, the plating, and the service to guests. There are greeters, cleaners, monitors and “saints.”



No one should be hungry for food, companionship, respect, compassion, laughter.”

– Lynne Bowling



■ Volunteers prepare meals in the kitchen at St. Philomene. Left to right: Sonja Spagnolo, Wendy Voss and Jeanette Carrillo.



■ Volunteers Kim Dahlberg, left, and Lori Mahannah pack Christmas stockings to be distributed to children.

Volunteers include parishioners and students from local Catholic and public schools, and California State University, Sacramento. Many students are fulfilling duties for service hours, often facing the “eye-opening realities of poverty” for the first time.

“I say ‘that’s fine, but just do me one favor,’” Jim notes, mentoring youth in these life-changing moments with a pivotal request. “Once you’re done with all your service hours, come one more time, at least, just for your soul,” he advises.

Jim says helpers do arrive with “great enthusiasm and joy, and smiling and happy.” He suggests “You can’t have any more satisfying work than joining a bunch of righteous brothers and sisters in corporal works of mercy.”

“All we care about for volunteers is that you have an open heart and that you want to help,” Jim stresses,

noting how people of all faiths, and no faith, have walked through their doors to “do Matthew 25.”

Indeed, volunteers make it work. Under normal circumstances, Bounty serves anywhere from 300 to 800 meals on Tuesdays. At its height, it served more than 1,300 meals for special Thanksgiving and Christmas events pre-COVID. Last Christmas, straddling the precarious open-closed reality, Bounty modified again, serving a reduced crowd but continuing traditions of Christmas stockings, candy and toys.

Jim also names other “saints” who double as shoppers, individual donors, generous organizations, and those who pray for the ministry. “I could name 50 different organizations over the course of all the years that have donated when we needed food,” he says, voicing immense gratitude. He also credits pastor, Father Frank Velazquez, the parish and the school for “happily donating the room, the electricity for the lights, the heat, everything.”

AT THE END OF THE EVENING

“One of our protocols is that after dinner we always serve a meal to our volunteers,” Jim explains, underscoring the importance of sharing in solidarity and consuming the same meal guests enjoyed earlier. He signals that many feel uncomfortable eating what should be for the poor. Eloquently Jim says, “some are one cash step away from being a guest,” poignantly imparting fragility, gratitude and dignity all at once.

Lynne sees the ministry as infused with love. “No one should be hungry for food, companionship, respect, compassion, laughter,” she says, convinced that these are the gifts of Sharing God’s Bounty.

When asked about the future – the end game – for Bounty, Jim paints a lovely picture. “Some Tuesday we will have 30 or 40 volunteers as usual, and we will have prepared the hot meal and we will open the door and nobody will be there,” he says. “All of them are fed, nobody is hungry and they’ve all had their meal at home,” he continues with detectable, albeit bittersweet, joy. “We will close the doors, sit down, eat our meal, sing Kumbaya and go home content in knowing we lived the life that Jesus asked of us.” †

“**You can’t have any more satisfying work than joining a bunch of righteous brothers and sisters in corporal works of mercy.**” – Judge Jim Mize



■ The dinner menu.

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