


HISTORY OF THE SACRAMENTO FOOD BANK & FAMILY SERVICES

ESTABLISHED JANUARY 1976

FR. DAN MADIGAN

FAMILY
SERVICES



SACRAMENTO
Food Bank
& Family
SERVICES



BOOK COMPILED BY
BESSIE FAY ARENA
AND
BERNARD BOWLER

TRAGIC REALITIES!

America's Coronavirus Pandemic
Sacramento's Homeless Epidemic



2020

Fr. Dan Madigan

A photograph of a man, Father Dan Madigan, sitting next to a dog in front of a fireplace. The man is wearing a blue patterned sweater and has his arm around the dog. The dog is a grey and white speckled breed with a purple collar. The fireplace has a fire burning in it. The title "Letters from the Hearth" is written in a yellow cursive font in the upper left corner.

*Letters
from the
Hearth*

Father Dan Madigan

Chuck Sylva

“Enter To Learn, Leave To Serve”. Chuck Sylva Took These Words Seriously. This Article Mentions Just Two Of The Areas That Chuck Was Of Service: Christian Brothers And The Food Bank. President Lorcan Barnes Has Written about Christian Brothers And Father Dan Madigan, Founder Of The Food Bank, Wrote About The Food Bank.

Chuck Received The Prestigious Santa Clara Ignation Award For His Work With The Food Bank.

The Food Bank (Year 2020) Is Using The Front Of Christian Brothers School As A Driv-Thru to Pick Up Groceries Every Friday.

Msgr. Dan Madigan also Gave CB Three Books He Wrote: “Letters From The Heart”, History Of The Sacramento Food Bank” And “Tragic Realities”

Food Bank

Most priests aren't trained for inner city work, and I was no exception. It is possible to naively enter a world such as Oak Park and miss the whole picture for a long time. I learned the language of the streets by osmosis. The needs of the community were apparent to anyone with half a desire to observe them. Food was the most obvious, most basic need. After Mass on Sundays, and at all hours of the day and night, indigent people rang our rectory doorbell asking for bread, a meal, or money to buy their children a hamburger.

Starting a small food locker and soup kitchen required no great stretch of my organizational ability, but resources were tight. Members of our Oak Park parish jumped to the task, and within a couple of years we were bursting at the seams. At that point, we had refrigerators everywhere: on the grounds, in the church school, under the auditorium stage, on top of the stage, in the



pay for this building. One morning he told me he was taking me to visit a friend of his, Chris Steele, who was then partner of a successful development company.

Until that point, everything was going fine. I was secure within my own Catholic community, doing the work with the poor I felt called to do. I had lots of help from my parishioners past and present, and Chuck's great gift of time and business experience. However, I had no connections in the community at large, certainly not in the business community, and no idea of how to develop them. Despite my ability to get up and tell stories and give sermons, I'm terribly shy in such foreign circumstances. I'd never asked

anyone for money in my life. I had stomach for it. I suppose I'd had to make general appeals in church for donations, but I couldn't ask a friend for even \$5. I just couldn't do it.

So we were driving down the freeway on this maiden voyage, when Chuck said, "You'll meet my friend, and I want you to ask him for money."

"Oh, gosh, no," I said. "He's *your* friend. You ask him."

"Oh, no-no-no," Chuck responded. "I'm just doing the introducing. This is your project, and you're going to have to start doing the asking."

I can remember at that point feeling very very uneasy, very, very uptight. I was thinking, "I can't do this. There's no way. It'll kill me."

Finally I said to Chuck, "How much shall I ask him for?"

He said, "I want you to ask him for \$100,000."

Honestly, I could have asked him to pull off to the side of the freeway so I could throw up!

When we arrived at Chris Steele's office he was very friendly. He told us how he got his start from humble beginnings, and asked about our project and the purchase of the Arata building. He and Chuck were talking real estate this and development that, and all of a sudden he turned to me and said, "Father, what can I do for you? I know you've come to me for help."

So, I looked at the man and I don't know

how, but I blurted out, "Could you give us \$100,000?" He looked back at me and without blinking an eye said, "Well, I think we can, but I need to talk to my partner about it." So we left, and that was it.

It was only a matter of weeks when a \$50,000 check arrived in the mail. I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it. The check came along with a note: "You'll get the other \$50,000 when the cows come home." Well, the cows came home rather quickly, and within a couple of months we were well on our way towards paying back our loan. Because of that, Chris Steele will always be my financial hero. While people have come along and done enormous things for SFBS since, two people, Chris Steele and David Allen, did something for me when SFBS was penniless and owned nothing. Steele, who gave me that first check, and Allen, who soon afterwards donated the proceeds of the sale of a house, showed they believed in our vision.

From then on it was easier to go out and ask, and we started getting checks and more checks. We passed the collection plate at churches, and had teams of eight to ten people asking for donations from people as they left church. A crusty old fund-raiser we hired to advise us was familiar with raising money for the Catholic Church. When it came time to make our appeal to St. Mel's parish in the suburban community of Fair Oaks, he convinced us to try a different tactic.

Father Richard Doheny agreed to let us set up tables with volunteers, serve coffee and

cookies down in the church school after mass. At services, when it came time for me to talk about our project, I didn't directly ask for a collection. Instead, I urged the congregation to read our pamphlets, and said there would be volunteers down at the school happy to tell them more. Now, I knew this was a wealthy congregation, and expected I could walk out of there with perhaps \$4,000 in pledges. But dozens of people accepted our invitation for coffee and a chat with our volunteers, and I walked out of that church at the end of the day with \$80,000 in pledges! That experience taught me a valuable lesson. Sitting down and talking face-to-face with a person, personally sharing your excitement about a program, is a far more effective fundraising strategy than simply passing a basket after a speech.

Chuck, in addition to being a brilliant planner and businessman, helped me build my own foundation for fundraising and developing strong community ties. First, he recommended I join the Rotary Club of Sacramento. Now, there are over 27,000 Rotary Clubs in the world, and Rotary of Sacramento is number 15 in size. It has nearly 500 active members. Walking into a meeting was, for me, a very frightening experience. I felt, "I'm different. I'm not wearing a business suit and tie, I'm not in real estate or banking, I'm a priest, and there's no way I'll ever fit in." Even though the club's members were very friendly, and seemed a wonderfully generous bunch of community-minded people, I had such difficulty

overcoming my own shyness I resigned after just a couple of months of meetings.

I wrote a letter saying I had to resign on account of my duties and such, but I confess it was a lie. It was because I just didn't feel comfortable. The club was so generous, though, it wrote back, and instead of accepting my resignation, gave me a leave of absence. I was overwhelmed with how nice they were. I thought, "If they're that kind, then I'm going to try and get courage enough to go back." Later, I even got the courage to tell the true story to the club's president, Dave Murphy.

So, with the help of Chuck Sylva, John Healey and the generous people at Rotary, I broke out of my cloistered world and into the community at large. My newsletters about the work we were doing at the Food Bank were sent to hundreds of people, then thousands. Hundreds more personal thank-you notes were required as the newsletters generated donations.

As we built our funding base and got the community more involved in our work, we also firmed up our philosophy.

Above all, we wanted to serve the poor, but not to participate in the pauperization of the poor. In other words, we believe we should treat each person with the dignity each person deserves. So often, volunteer

agencies in service to the poor take a "loose" approach to their management. If they say they'll be open from 10-12, they might be open from 10:15 to 11:45. After all, they reason, the staff are volunteers. Goods are donated and donations may run out.

I find such an approach absolutely unacceptable. It requires the poor, so often forced to wait in long lines, to wait even more, or be turned away without notice. The core of my management style at SFBS has always been: "Do exactly what we say we'll do, at the time we say we'll do it." Anything else sends a message to the poor that they deserve less.

I'm a stickler on this issue, and sometimes lose my cool when I see people taking a more lax approach to their responsibilities. We have to ask ourselves, I think, what message we send by our behavior. Is handing out food simply a way for us to feel benevolent? Are we content to hand out food as long as the poor keep "their place"? Or are we really responsible for giving more than just handouts?

As our food programs grew, these questions loomed in my mind. And I was reminded over and over again that Fr. Girzone was right when he suggested that religion is not the only arena for God's work.

From: Lorcan Barnes lorcanpbarnes@gmail.com

Subject: Comments on Chuck Sylva '65

Date: Sep 26, 2020 at 11:31:00 AM

To: jkirrene@sbcglobal.net

Jerry,

I'm sorry for my slow response. My mother had a couple of falls in So Cal so I've been dealing w/ that. Here are some thoughts on Chuck Sylva '65. I'm happy to expand, adjust as you wish ... just let me know if you want something different.

— Chuck just wants the best for people who deserve a fair shot. There are no hidden or complicated agendas.

— Chuck is motivated by impact and outcomes. He cuts through anything fancy. He has very little patience for people who seek attention for doing the right thing.

— Arguably, no one person deserves more credit for the strong position CB enjoys today than Chuck Sylva '65. He has been in a leadership position at CB for 50 years. Sometimes it's a public role ... such as chairing a capital campaign or serving on the Board of Regents or the Board of Directors. Often times, though, Chuck's influence is behind the scenes ... providing feedback and advice to the president, advocating for CB to alumni and business leaders, or being an ambassador for CB in Sacramento.

— Very few people know how generous Chuck is. He is a rare philanthropist insofar as he does more than just give financial support. He advocates to his peers to join him in making a difference. CB has benefitted from Chuck's integrity and relationships. A number of people support CB b/c of what they heard about the school from Chuck. They respect Chuck. Chuck believes in CB. So they support CB.

— When I came to CB in 2004, Chuck was one of the first persons I met. He cares DEEPLY about his alma mater. He saw the impact that Christian Brothers had on him in the early 1960's. His life was enriched by mixing with kids from different walks of life. And he sees how valuable a Catholic

education is today. Even though it may be different than what he experienced, Chuck is able to cut through to the essence of how a Catholic high school can change individual lives and improve society.

— Chuck is a class act. He'll find the best in people and affirms their dignity even if he disagrees with the person or doesn't feel they're the right person for the job. As long as someone's heart is in the right place, Chuck will give them respect.

— Chuck's Catholic faith was modeled mainly by his parents but also in the example of many good priests, nuns, Brothers, and lay people. Chuck lives his Catholic faith in action.

-Lorcan