

Hunger News & Hope

A Seeds of Hope Publication

'Tens of Millions of Small Things'

Our most recent issues of *Hunger News & Hope* and *Sacred Seasons*, particularly the ones that have been published this year, have been full of bad news—and not much hope. They have conveyed information that is hard to read, much less to contemplate. Of course, we realize that it's because life for hungry people in this world has become so much harder in 2025.

There comes a point, however, when our own mental health can't take much more. Those of us who care deeply about vulnerable people have been grieving for months. We don't want to stop caring about these people, but, after all, this publication has the word "hope" in its title.

We don't need to tell you that bad things are happening to vulnerable people. You see it in your newsfeed and on television every day. Therefore, we are now pledging to share the good things that people are doing, doggedly doing, day after day, in spite of the vortex of bad news. We are printing these in the hope that these stories will be life-giving to weary fighters for justice.

I recently ran across the following quote in *The Catholic Worker*. The article, written by Brian Terrell, is titled "Millions of Small Things."

Considering the enormity of the danger that the world is facing, do our small efforts, our protests and jailings, make any difference? In our movements there is a false dichotomy, I think, between being faithful and being effective. "I'm convinced that if the world survives these dangerous times, it will be tens of millions of small things that do it," said the folk singer Pete Seeger. Perhaps the best, the most effective contribution we can make to save the planet will be for each of us to accomplish one or two of the tens of millions of small things that need to be done.

We have adopted this as a theme for this issue. We hope you will find ideas and inspiration in these stories of people doing their part in the millions of small things.

-lkc

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Something Sacred & Holy: *The Story of the Red Door Pantry*

by Charley Garrison

Do you think you can help us out with some groceries?" It was a simple request, but one that would give rise to a ministry that continues 20 years later. My church's Red Door Pantry began in January 2006 when a couple of members of my congregation, one of whom was HIV-positive¹, approached me and asked if I could help them out with groceries. Between the high cost of utilities, HIV medications, gas, and food, they were struggling to make ends meet. *Well, of course we could! I thought to myself. After all, that's what churches do, isn't it?* And we did.

It occurred to me that if we could do it for them, maybe we could help out other members of the HIV

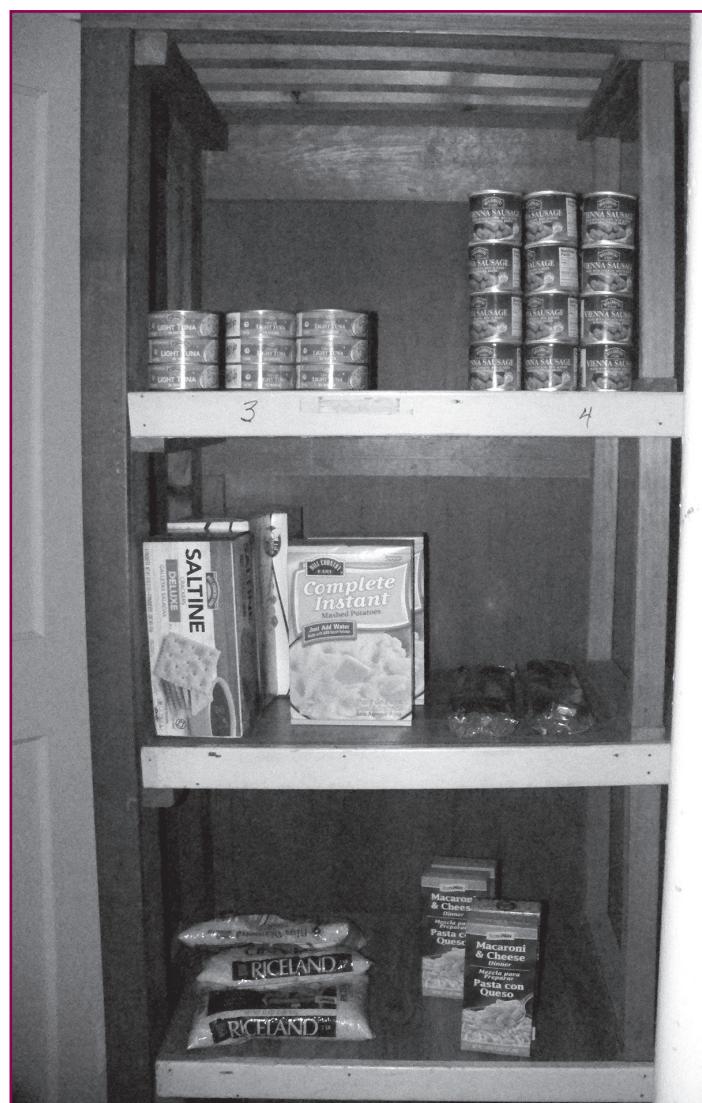
community who needed assistance—maybe a food pantry serving people who are living with HIV, like the ones I knew operated in other cities. I thought that the pantry—and later, our HIV support groups—would be duplications of other services in the area, but I was wrong. There were no other pantries dedicated to the HIV community in the entire county, and unfortunately, there still aren't.

In no time at all, I was connected with the McLennan County Health Department, which was more than willing to refer HIV-positive clients to us. The challenge was keeping up with the demand. Fortunately, local drag queens jumped on the bandwagon, and they worked hard creating a "wall of food" at the local gay bar where they performed, inviting people to donate canned goods and using their tips to purchase canned goods until a wall at the bar was stacked high with nonperishable food items.

However, it was amazing how fast the food disappeared as more and more clients began to take advantage of the pantry. I tried organizing fundraisers, which only temporarily helped. I tried appealing to the congregation: *"Last week was 'corn week.' And this week is 'green bean week,' folks! So, when you go to the grocery store, remember to pick up a couple cans of green beans for the pantry!"* But people always forgot when they were at the store. I was afraid the pantry would be short-lived and would soon be going by the wayside.

And so, I prayed. "God," I said, "if you want this pantry to succeed, you're going to have to do something about it because I've tried everything I can think of." Of course, the answer came back clear as a bell: "No, you haven't. You haven't asked everyone." I was being told to reach beyond the walls of our church and the LGBTQ community and ask for money from Waco's community-at-large.

So I mailed out an appeal letter to everyone whose address I had acquired over the last six years, inviting them to become a member of the "Circle of 40." The letter listed food and hygiene items typically selected



Left: The shelves of the Red Door Pantry for HIV patients at the Central Texas Metropolitan Community Church in Waco, empty quickly.

Photo by Charley Garrison.

by a client, along with the price of each. At that time, it only cost an average of \$12 for a client to walk out with bags of groceries and hygiene products that they had selected for themselves. We were serving about 40 people per month, hence the name "Circle of 40." The letter invited people to make a \$144 donation to feed a person for a full year, with the promise that I wouldn't bother them again until the next year!

To my amazement, the money came pouring in, and it opened my eyes to an understanding that people are generous if they know how their money is going

The letter invited people to make a \$144 donation to feed a person for a full year, with the promise that I wouldn't bother them again until the next year!

to be used. Another source of income was a large sum that came from a portion of the life insurance policy of a leader within the LGBTQ community who had recently died.

Also, the Court of the Central Texas Empire, a group of drag performers committed to raising funds for local charities, dedicated a portion of the funds from their performances to the pantry. We were finally off and running. And because we served a relatively small group of people each month, my volunteers and I got to know them on a personal level. We took the time to learn their names and to listen to their stories, their pain and their joys.

If a client couldn't make it into the pantry because of transportation or health issues, we took their order by phone, and I delivered the groceries to their doorstep. This led to even closer relationships.

I remember one elderly person who, well before the word was popularized, would be described as nonbinary. They had cancer and their days were numbered, so I did what I could for them. After taking their order and delivering the groceries, I would hang out for a while and visit. They were a cantankerous sort of person, and when I drove them to pick up their prescriptions, I learned to browse the shelves, pretending I didn't know the customer giving

*Right: The Red Door Pantry for HIV patients, located at the Central Texas Metropolitan Community Church in Waco, gets its name from the color of the church door.
Photo by Katie Cook.*

the "what for" to the employee behind the counter. They were a handful, but when the time came, it was an honor to preside over their graveside burial at the local county-run burial ground for residents who can't afford funeral costs.

In time, I would hear more and more clients introducing me to others as "their pastor." At first, I wanted to set the record straight that they weren't really members of my congregation. But I've learned that these are not clients; they are guests, and my congregation extended beyond the walls of the church at which I preach on Sunday mornings. My congregation was growing—not a congregation that contributed to our financial budget or even attended on Sunday mornings, but a congregation made up of courageous people determined to live in spite of a disease that carried with it a debilitating stigma.

I've buried their bodies and presided over their weddings. And sometimes I was the lucky recipient of joyful news, like that of a teenage mother with cancer, who was growing more and more frail as her chemotherapy treatments ravaged her body. One day, as

Please see "Red Door Pantry" on page 4.



Red Door Pantry, continued from page 3

I pulled up to her apartment with her groceries, she threw open the door, and running into the parking lot shouted for all the world to hear, "Pastor Charley, I'm cancer-free! I beat it! I beat it!"

But I was also the recipient of heart-breaking news from case workers: "Pastor Charley, because of HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act], I can't disclose anything other than that --- won't be needing groceries anymore."

During the COVID pandemic, I was considered an "essential worker" because I was operating a food pantry. So, instead of remaining quarantined, I woke up before dawn each morning to get in line at the grocery store, masked, gloved, and positioned with my shopping cart six feet behind the person in front of me. I tried to arrive early enough so that I was one of the first ones to be allowed into the store. I had a mental list of what the pantry needed, and I knew exactly where the items were located in the stores. I would rush to grab them after I got my ration of toilet paper, which, for some reason, was frequently in short supply. Always toilet paper first!

Against all odds, I managed to keep the shelves of the pantry stocked. No person living with HIV had to go without food or hygiene products. The pantry continued to serve people with only a few adjustments. When I made food deliveries, I left the groceries on the

doorstep instead of handing the bags to the person. Sometimes, I called them on my cell phone when I arrived and popped the latch on my trunk so they could grab the bags themselves. The folks who had always come to the pantry to pick up their bags of groceries continued to do so, but I couldn't allow them to enter the building. Instead, I took their order by phone and brought the bags out to their car.

One day, upon entering the church building, I immediately noticed an open door that I knew I had not left open. I quietly made my way into the empty room and discovered a crocheted Afghan blanket curled up in the corner next to an unsecured window. I recognized the blanket as one that was usually folded neatly in the fellowship hall.

Hoping our visitor was no longer in the building, I made my way from one room to another, only to find partially consumed pantry items, such as an opened can of partially eaten fruit cocktail sitting on the serving counter. Then, an empty can of Vienna sausages next to the coffee maker, and then, a can of chili on the stair banister next to the bathroom. It soon became clear that no vandalism had taken place, that only enough food was taken from the pantry to satisfy our visitor's appetite, and that the visitor had managed to get a decent night's rest, safe and out of the weather. All was well.

After the unsecured window was boarded up, I was having a conversation with a church member about the incident. "It's a shame," he said, "that we can't help out folks without them feeling a need to

break into the church." He suggested building a box that could be installed outside the building. "Oh, you mean like the Little Free Libraries we see around town," I replied. "Yeah, like those," he said, "except filled with food instead of books." What a great idea! So, I looked online to see if it had been tried anywhere else—only to learn that there



*Left: The Li'l Free Pantry, built by a church member, stands just outside the door of the Central Texas Metropolitan Community Church in Waco.
Photo by Charley Garrison.*

is a national movement of Little Free Pantries. The concept is that anyone can leave nonperishable food in the small outdoor pantries, and folks who need food help themselves.

Fortunately, one of our church members, who is a skilled woodworker, constructed a box with shelves in it and a plexiglass hinged front so folks could see what was in the pantry. We attached it to the railing along the church's ramp entrance and put the word out on

Not wanting to stare, I continued with my task. And when I came out of the church next, I saw him kneeling before her on the street curb offering her a sandwich. It looked like a tableau from a Christmas nativity scene. Or maybe someone proposing marriage on bended knee. I knew at once that I had been given a glimpse of something sacred and holy. And I was grateful for it.

social media about our new ministry. People responded as enthusiastically as they had with the Red Door Pantry, with some people placing items inside the box and others taking advantage of the PayPal button on our website specifically dedicated to the "Li'l Free Pantry."

Each week I'm able to use donated funds to keep the pantry stocked with things suitable for unhoused people in our neighborhood: no-cook items such as canned chili, Vienna sausages, canned ravioli, canned tuna, a loaf of bread, peanut butter, jelly, an apple, an orange and a banana.

Comfort foods such as pudding cups, fruit cups, chips and cookies are also available. When folks drop off something like canned pumpkin, which they are sometimes given from the local food bank and have no use for, I make pumpkin muffins with it and place them in the pantry. And we make sure there are always hygiene items, as well as condoms, compliments of the county health department.

I place the items in the pantry at the beginning and ending of my office hours, and I'm always surprised at how quickly the pantry is emptied within just a matter of hours, sometimes within minutes. Oc-

casionally, I hear a timid knock on the church door by someone asking if they can use our restroom or get a drink of water. *This is what it's all about!* I think to myself. This, and the relationships I've begun to develop with people living on the streets who are grateful for our generosity.

One day as I was walking out of my office, I was startled to find a young woman who had entered the building. For a brief moment she looked as startled as me, but her reaction was far from the same as mine. Whereas I busted into laughter at the surprise, she quickly folded into a fetal position, and covering her head, whimpered, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...." And the only thought I had was: What kind of life had she lived that would cause her to react that way?! And was it because I was a privileged white man and she was a Black unhoused woman?

After getting her calmed down, I got the drink of water she had come inside for. After asking her name, I learned she was a great fan of Spam. None of those knock-off store brands, mind you! The real stuff! Spam! So the next time I saw her, I handed her a can of Spam. You would have thought I had given her a million dollars! She comes and she goes, and I try to always keep a can of Spam in reserve for her.

Among the more popular items in our Li'l Free Pantry are a loaf of bread, a jar of peanut butter and a jar of jelly, along with a disposable spoon or knife for spreading the condiments on the bread. One day during the Christmas season, I had just purchased groceries for the outdoor pantry and was unloading them

Please see "Red Door Pantry" on page 19.

If You Want to Help...

If you live in the Central Texas area and would like to support Waco's Red Door Pantry with in-kind items, go to centexmcc.com/hiv-ministry to find out what food items are popular.

If you want to leave an in-kind donation for the Li'l Free Pantry, just stop by any time of the day, and place it in the outdoor pantry located on the side of the building at 1601 Clay Avenue. Ready-to-eat, no-cook items are most popular. There is no need to contact the church unless it's more than will fit in the pantry. In that case, leave a message at 254-752-5331 or email us at centexmcc@earthlink.net.

If you prefer to make a tax-free, secure financial donation to either pantry, go to centexmcc.com/donate and select the PayPal button associated with the pantry you wish to support.

If you would like to begin a similar ministry in your area and would like a few pointers, contact Charley Garrison phone number or email address above.

A Place to Belong: *The Story of Community First Village*

by Richard Groves

Editor's note: On a recent visit to Austin, TX, Richard Groves, along with his wife, Niki, visited the Community First Village, a cluster of "tiny homes" and other houses that was designed for chronically unhoused people.

“What is the worst thing about being homeless?” I asked David Young, aka “the Tigerman,” who had been on the streets of Boston for four years.

I anticipated that he would say that it was living outdoors in bitter New England winters or never knowing where your next meal was coming from.

“No matter where I go,” he said, “the subway or the library or a coffee shop, it’s just a matter of time before someone tells me I ain’t supposed to be there.”

“The worst thing about being homeless,” he told me, “is knowing that there ain’t no place in the world that I’m supposed to be.”

The young woman who escorted Niki and me, along with a man from Philadelphia and a couple from Detroit, around the sprawling development on the outskirts of Austin explained that the reason Community First Village continues to use the term “homeless”¹ is because what people who live on the streets need is a place in the world they’re supposed to be—a home.

Niki and I were in Austin visiting family, but added a visit to Community First Village to our itinerary after several staff members of City with Dwellings, an organization that serves the homeless population in Winston-Salem, reported on their recent visit.

Niki is a member of the board of directors of City with Dwellings.

“Housing will never solve homelessness in our country, but community will.”

—Alan Graham

Community First Village is the product of the vision and passion of Alan Graham, a former real estate developer, who describes himself as “a Catholic and a serial entrepreneur.”

He tells the story of Community First Village, which accepted its first resident in 2015, in his book “Welcome Homeless: One Man’s Journey of Discovering the Meaning of Home.”

“Housing will never solve homelessness in our country,” he told *Parade Magazine* in a 2017 interview, “but community will.”

It’s easy to get lost in the details:

- 400: the number of formerly chronically homeless persons living in tiny houses, manufactured homes, and 3-D printed constructions on 51 acres on Hog Eye Road outside Austin;
- Nine: the average number of years residents were homeless;
- 5,000: the number of people who volunteer at Community First Village each year;



Left: Community First Village, located outside of Austin, TX, consists of tiny houses, manufactured homes, and 3-D printed structures.
Photo by Richard Groves.

- 1,900: the number of residents when a nearby expansion is completed.

There's a small medical facility, a convenience store where residents (who are referred to as "neighbors") can buy basic necessities and visitors can buy crafts made by the residents, both an outdoor garden and a hydroponic garden, and an outdoor movie theater.

There is also a hospice house. Life expectancy for someone who has lived on the streets as long as some of the residents have is 60. The average age of residents is 58.

There's a staff member who negotiates conflicts between people who haven't been neighbors to anybody in years and another staff member who helps residents transition from life on the streets to what will be their home for the rest of their lives.

But it is the "neighbors" you meet who make the biggest impression.

Like the woman who proudly told me that she had been off the street and in a place of her own four years. She suggested that I should walk to the pond—"There's some real pretty flowers down there"—but that I should "watch out for the snakes." This being Texas and all.

And Jose, who was at a potter's wheel when we stepped into the art house. He discovered his latent artistic ability when he came to Community First Village two years ago. He sells his work online and at local crafts shows.

And the tall man who recognized us as visitors to the Village and called out from the sidewalk, "You know what Community First Village did for me? It taught me that I am somebody."

"I've got a home, and I've got a job sweeping out Unity Hall after meetings."

"What's your name?" asked the man in the Detroit Tigers cap.

The tall man on the sidewalk seemed to grow an inch: "Mister Nathan Edwards."

Mister Nathan Edwards has always been somebody, but thanks to Community First Village, now he knows it.

—Richard Groves is a retired pastor living in Winston-Salem, NC. He is a longtime contributor to Seeds publications. This article appeared earlier in the Winston-Salem Journal and the Greensboro News and Record. For more information about the Tiny Homes movement, see "Tiny Homes: A New Way to Address Homelessness" by Grace Sinclair, Hunger News & Hope, Vol 24 No 2, Fall 2024, p. 4. For electronic copies of Hunger News & Hope, go to www.seedspublishers.org/news or email seedseditor1@gmail.com.

Editor's note

1. A growing number of people who work and write among people without homes have begun to prefer the term "unhoused" because they consider that it is more sensitive than "homeless." The Seeds staff made a few phone calls to shelters and soup kitchens and found that, although this was the general consensus of the workers in the Central Texas area, no one seemed to feel strongly one way or the other.

You have all kinds of information at your fingertips.
What are you going to do with it?

Come, journey with us.
Keep up with who's hungry and what's being done about it.
Please help us continue this important work.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

For more information about the Seeds ministry, call 254-498-4997 or email seedseditor1@gmail.com. You can go to www.seedspublishers.org or scan the QR code below and use the donate button. If you don't have any money, you can support us by praying for our ministry.

—From the Seeds of Hope staff & Council of Stewards



Homeless, Not Voiceless: A Story of the Dallas Street Choir

by Katie Cook

It was a cold winter morning in downtown Dallas. I had finally found the First Presbyterian Church and encountered a man at the front doors of the church. I asked if he knew where a choir was rehearsing. He said, "The Dallas Street Choir? I'm in it. Come with me."

We went to the sanctuary, where I met the choir founder, Jonathan Palant, along with Betty Heckman, the director of Enrichment Programs at the Stewpot, where the choir was founded. Then I met about 20 singers—all people who are presently or formerly unhoused. All of them seemed delighted to be there.

Palant began with the question "Who are you?" I was expecting names, but the choir members answered with words like "loved," "inspired," "somebody" and "unique."

After vocal warm-up exercises, the hour-long rehearsal began with medleys of pop songs the members already knew. Then they started working on newer songs. All of the songs had a positive message. As choir member Jennifer told me later, some of them start out a little sad, but they all end on a happy note. The choir's tagline says "Homeless, Not Voiceless." It was easy to believe, sitting in that sanctuary, watching their faces and listening to the pleasure in their songs.

After the rehearsal, the members enjoyed sandwiches made for them by youth from a local synagogue.

As the group was dispersing, I spoke with choir member Ron. He said that he loved the choir because people's voices were blending and intermingling—a metaphor for what was really going on among them. The singing was building community. I said, "That's very insightful." He then told me that he was once a professional singer.

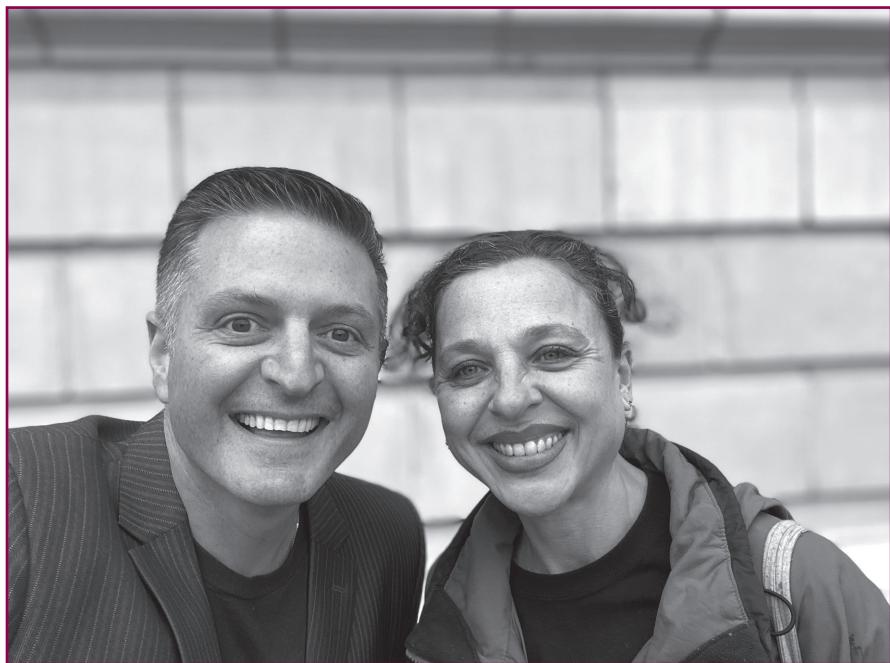
After the rehearsal, I spent some time visiting with Jennifer and Ossie (*see the interview on page 10*), after which they escorted me around the corner to the Stewpot, where this all began.

The Stewpot

The Stewpot, just around the corner from the church, has been serving neighbors in need for more than 50 years. Its declared mission is to help them break free from poverty and homelessness. It was founded as a mission of First Presbyterian Church and has grown to provide many vital housing and nutrition programs, as well as stabilization and education programs. It has served more than 8 million meals since 1975.

In addition, Stewpot is home to several enrichment programs, which my new friends from the choir showed me after our interview. One of these is an art program, which includes art classes, help with exhibiting and sale of the neighbors' art, and a colorful gallery along the corridors of the building. There are also writers workshops and a street newspaper called STREETZine.

The Stewpot recently added a food pantry, a Neighbor Resource Center, and a coordinated street outreach team, which goes to encampments to help unhoused neighbors living there with IDs and to help them sign up for housing.



*Left: Jonathan Palant with choir member Lisa.
Photo courtesy of Jonathan Palant.*

The Dallas Street Choir

In 2014, Jonathan Palant¹ had a vision about providing a musical outlet for people affected by homelessness. He wanted to offer them a place to experience choral music.

Since then, more than 2,000 people have attended at least one of the weekly rehearsals on a Wednesday morning. They come from all walks of life. According to the choir's website, 68 percent of these singers

They come from all walks of life. According to the choir's website, 68 percent of these singers stay in shelters and 23 percent live on the streets. Some have been able to move to transitional housing.

stay in shelters and 23 percent live on the streets. Some have been able to move to transitional housing. Age-wise, almost half of the singers are in their forties and fifties. Two-thirds of them have high school diplomas. Some 64 percent are African American.

The choir has performed in an impressive array of venues throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. They began by presenting concerts at the Stewpot and the nearby, newly built Amphitheater. They then moved on to the Winspear Opera House, the Dallas City Performance Hall, the George W. Bush Presidential Library, and at both public and private schools. The choir has performed with opera stars and for nationally known political leaders. It also performed at Carnegie Hall and The Washington National Cathedral. The latter was covered by NBC's *Today Show*.

The choir has also produced a semi-staged choral oratorio, *Shelter Me*, which was inspired by the lives of its members. The story follows the journey of a young man who suddenly finds himself on the "unforgiving" streets. He is helped by an older man "well-versed in the trials of homelessness." *Shelter Me* is available online.²

One of the outcomes of all these performances is the community, joy

and sense of accomplishment they have offered the singers. But another outcome is that this exposure of the choir has improved the way communities see unhoused people. The choir has shown that "participation in a consistent, structured, safe, and creatively engaging environment" creates possibilities for improving the members' lives. They are better equipped to find jobs and housing, and to seek better lives. They are achieving "what once seemed impossible through the seemingly simple act of singing."

-Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. Note: Jonathan Palant urges anyone who is interested in creating a similar initiative to check out the resources on the website for the National Alliance for Music in Vulnerable Communities (www.namvc.org).

Endnotes

1. Jonathan Palant is Associate Dean of the Arts and Director of Choral Activities at the University of Texas at Dallas and is founder and conductor of the Credo Community Choir, a 140-member adult mixed choir, as well as the Dallas Street Choir. He served on the board of directors at Youth First Texas, where he was founder and conductor of Dallas PUMP!, a choir serving at-risk youth. He has served as president of the National Alliance for Music in Vulnerable Communities. He has received a number of awards for his creative work with these communities. He contributed to an article in the *Choral Journal* titled "The Dallas Street Choir: The Impact of Communal Singing on Those Experiencing Homelessness," which is accessible online.
2. The premiere performance of *Shelter Me* is available to rent or buy from the choir's website (www.dallasstreetchoir.org/shelterme), and it can also be found on Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube music.



Right: A Street Choir rehearsal. Photo courtesy of the Dallas Street Choir.

An Interview with Members of the Dallas Street Choir

by Katie Cook

Author's note: After visiting a rehearsal of the Dallas Street Choir at the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Dallas, I was privileged to visit with two of the choir members, Jennifer and Ossie.

Katie: How long have you been in the choir?

Jennifer: I've been in the choir for two years now. There was another woman who told me about it; we were staying in the same shelter, Austin shelter. I did music in my past. I was in choir growing up—show choir and all that stuff. I could read music and stuff. I loved being in the choir so much I stayed after I got my camper. (I'm still waiting on permanent housing.) The nice thing about the choir is that, even when you get housing, they let you stay and sing.

Ossie: I was here in the original choir, ten years ago. I helped set up the choir when it was over at the Stew-

pot. I would come in and arrange the chairs. Jonathan came in one day; I remember it was a cold day. You used to get coffee at the Stewpot every morning, and Jonathan would come in and ask people to come and sing in the choir. And he would give them a bus pass. I got extra passes because I arranged the chairs. And then we got more people from the shelter to come and sing.

There was one girl who told me that she had thought about killing herself before she started in the choir. It made that much happiness. It changed people's lives.

Katie: I've heard that being in the choir helps people find jobs. Have you experienced that?

Ossie: After the first performance, one of the girls came up and told me she had just gotten a job. She had been trying for weeks to get a job, and one of the people in the audience contacted her and gave her a job.

Jennifer: And there have been other people who have gotten connected, Jonathan got me connected with a group that was looking for a singer for their festival.

Ossie: We sang at the opening of the Amphitheater [near the Stewpot], and they paid me for setting up chairs, and then I made a little extra money wiping down tables. It makes a big difference.

Katie: I noticed that all of the songs you sang today seemed very upbeat. Is that how it usually is?

Jennifer: We do have some slow songs, but they're all really empowering. They're all uplifting.

Ossie: Sometimes it starts out sad, but then it turns to the happy.

Katie: You both seem to know all of the people you're talking about.

Jennifer: We see each other in lots of different places.

Left: Katie Cook (center) poses with her new friends from the Dallas Street Choir in one of the Stewpot corridors that make up the art gallery. A Stewpot neighbor interrupted her painting to take the photo.

Even though it's a city, the communities within the city are really small. You know people in that community.

Ossie: You get to know people when you go "out there." If you stay hidden, you don't. You have to get out there.

Katie: What would a typical day be like for you? I know you have choir rehearsals on Wednesdays.

There was one girl who told me that she had thought about killing herself before she started in the choir. It made that much happiness. It changed people's lives.

Ossie: Well, I go once a week to Beloved Women at Cornerstone Ministries. I shower three times a week, and on Thursday mornings, I go from there to Beloved Women. We play Bingo and do other things, and then we have prayer and Bible study. It's in a historical home, so it has that "home" feeling.¹ And then I go to Cathedral Guadalupe for the sacrament. And then there's also St. Jude Chapel.

Jennifer: You almost have to have a schedule when you're out here. When I was in the shelter, I needed to know exactly what I was going to do. I wanted to make sure I was doing something every day. I work in theatre. Right now, I'm stage-managing a show at the Allen Contemporary Theatre. And I work with kids at the Jewish Community Center, and we're doing *Guys & Dolls, Jr.* I'm doing props for a musical a few months from now, and I'm acting in a show that's coming up.

I want to stress that Jonathan is what makes the choir so enjoyable. I know it's about singing, but he is such a great leader.

Katie: He seems so positive, even when he is instructing.

Jennifer: And he's real.

Ossie: He's very thoughtful in what he chooses for us to do.

Katie: But I noticed that he won't let you get away with anything.

Ossie: (laughs) He gets onto me sometimes about smoking (laughs). He can tell if I've been smoking.

-Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor.

Author's note: After the interview, I asked Ossie and Jennifer to take me to the Stewpot, where I got a tour of the soup kitchen, the art department and the STREETZine office. (See the photo on page 10.)

Endnote

1. This was the first time Jennifer had heard about Beloved Women, and she made plans to attend.

Looking for ways to introduce your congregation to hunger issues?

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Farming While Black: Documentary Portrays New Generation of Farmers Reclaiming Land and Agricultural Heritage

Reviewed by Sara E. Alexander

Farming While Black is a film that captures the experiences of Black farmers at the intersection of food justice and sustainable agriculture interwoven with the history of Black farmers and landowners in America.

The feature-length documentary film examines the historical plight of Black farmers in the United States and the rising generation reclaiming their rightful ownership to land and reconnecting with their ancestral roots. Written and directed by Mark Decena, the documentary is executive produced by Kontent Films and was released in 2023.

Leah Penniman, a young Black farmer and co-founder of Soul Fire Farm located in Grafton, New York, on historically Mohican land, knows all too well the

plight of Black farmers in the United States. From the height of Black-owned farms at 14 percent in 1910 to less than 2 percent today, Leah and her Soul Fire Farm cohorts help propel a returning generation of young Black farmers to reclaim their sacred connection to land.

They do all this while fighting for the passage of landmark legislation: the Justice for Black Farmers Act. This rising generation of young Black farmers find strength in the deep historical knowledge of African agrarianism—and its potential to save the planet.

As the co-founder of Soul Fire Farm in upstate New York, Leah Penniman finds strength in this same knowledge of African farming throughout history—



Upper left: Karen Washington; lower left: Leah Penniman; center: Blain Snipstal. Photos courtesy of the Farming While Black film company.

which is why she chose to share it with other young farmers. Influenced and inspired by Karen Washington, an activist and pioneer in urban community gardens in New York City, and timber-framer and organic farmer Blain Snipstal, who possesses extensive knowledge of Afro-ecology, the core concept of the Black Dirt Farm Collective in Maryland, Leah galvanizes around farming as the basis of revolutionary justice.

The film chronicles Penniman, Washington, and Snipstal's efforts to reclaim their respective agricultural heritage. Segments detail how their childhoods influenced and shaped their work, as well as informative portrayals of each of the projects they direct. Collec-

tively, their work has a major impact, as each is a leader in sustainable agriculture and food justice movements in their regions.

Farming While Black is a powerful cinematic exploration of the intersectionality of race, class and agriculture. It offers a critical lens through which viewers can examine historical and contemporary issues of land ownership, food sovereignty and economic inequality. Through the stories of Penniman, Snipstal and Washington, the film serves as a catalyst for critical dialogue about the systemic barriers faced by Black farmers and the resilience of a community striving for liberation and self-determination. ■

Challenges Exposed in *Feeding Change*: A Film about the Food System in Hawaii

Reviewed by Sara E. Alexander

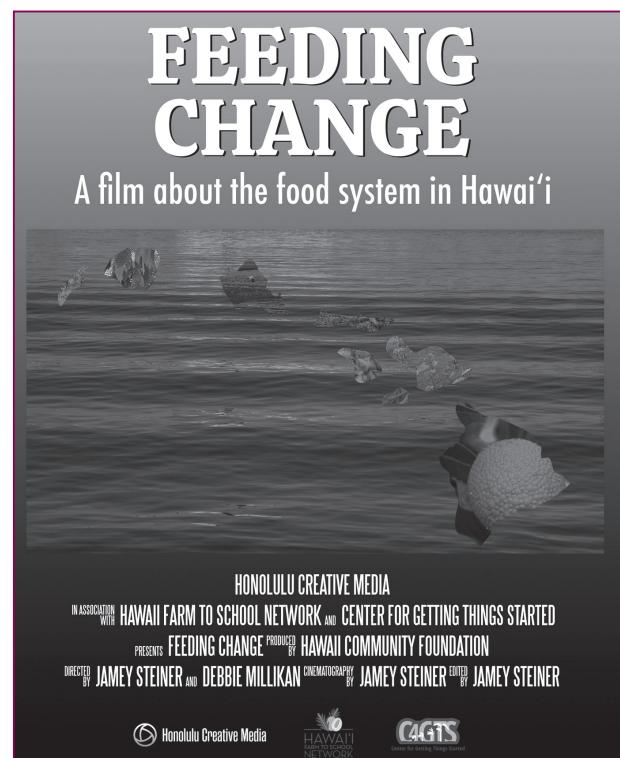
Through conversations with farmers, students, educators, food producers and local food systems advocates, this film uncovers the challenges and innovative solutions driving Hawaii's agricultural transformation. Hawaii proves to be a classic case study in inefficient economic systems that promote reliance on food exports while food grown on the islands wastes away, given the existing poor infrastructure for getting agricultural produce from farm to table. At its core, the documentary serves to provide the historical roots that help us understand the journey of food from farm to table and is designed to help empower the next gen-

eration to see themselves as active participants in Hawaii's local agriculture and food system.

The film journeys from vibrant school gardens to diverse agricultural landscapes, revealing the complex

Please see "Feeding Change" on page 14.

Sara Alexander is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Baylor University and a consultant with TANGO International (an NGO that provides technical assistance). As a social anthropologist, she has worked in Central America, West and East Africa, and Appalachia. Her research focuses on developing countries in such matters as livelihood security and vulnerability, food security, ecotourism, natural resource management, the human dimensions of climate change and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. She is a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards and of the *Hunger News & Hope* editorial team.



resource reviews

Feeding Change,

continued from page 13

ecosystem of food production in the islands. It examines the barriers to local food security—including land access, economic challenges and agricultural infrastructure—while highlighting the passionate individuals working to create sustainable, community-driven food systems.

Meet the next generation of Hawaii's food producers and advocates as they share their vision for a more resilient, locally sourced food future. Case studies focus on small-scale farming cooperatives, indigenous agricultural production and marketing groups, to non-governmental organizations such as Food Link helping to ensure access to food for families from all socio-economic groups.

Current systems tend to favor the poor and the wealthy, leaving the middle-class with no assistance and little means to meet rapidly escalating food prices.

From small family farms to cutting-edge agricultural programs in schools, this documentary captures the hope, hard work and collaborative spirit driving positive change in Hawaii's food landscape. A story of community, sustainability and the deep connection between land, food and people. *Feeding Change* is directed by Jamey Steiner and Debbie Millikan and produced by the Hawaii Community Foundation. It was released in 2024. ■



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**Sacred
Seasons**

It Matters to This One!

by Daniel John Yeary

Editor's note: With this and a few meditative pieces we've already used in Hunger News & Hope this year, we suddenly realized that we are bringing back a tradition that began more than 40 years ago, back in the Decatur days of the Seeds ministry. The tradition was a department called Taproot. It included calls from our own spiritual traditions that reminded us who we are and what we must do in the face of the needs of the world.

We laid Taproot aside in the early days of HNH, when the publication always had fewer pages, but we are beginning to be convinced that the time is right to dig it back out and look at our inspirations, our motivations, our projections, and even issues about which we may not agree.

We're beginning the first of "Taproot Reawakened" pieces here by reprinting the meditation from the cover of the first issue of Sprouts that came out after Seeds moved to Texas—that is, January 1992.

The old man, weathered by life and hardened by age, watched with interest as a boy ran along the seashore, picking up starfish and throwing them back into the sea. The shoreline was covered with thousands of starfish—stranded to die on the hot sands.

The seemingly tireless energy of the boy awakened the curiosity of the old man's otherwise untouchable spirit. The boy came closer to the old man, continuing his persistent rescue mission. Finally, close enough to be heard, the old man spoke: "What does it matter, son? There are thousands more you will never save." The boy, without hesitation, knelt to pick up another starfish, and tossing it into the sea, responded, "Well, it matters to this one."¹

There is something wonderful in the human heart that compels us to comb the shores of life in search of stranded starfish. Tossing even one back into the life-giving sea does, indeed, make a difference. We must believe that.

There is also that in the human spirit so cynical that we are paralyzed by the size of the task and our success-oriented psyches. Because the job is impossible and the task insurmountable, we choose to do nothing. Or we assume that the world is full of individuals

named George who will do something.

Exercising the good and exorcising the bad is the crux of our massive crisis. There never seem to be enough spirits willing to spend their time slinging starfish back into the waters of life; but the lack of available hands is no excuse for avoiding the hunger surrounding us. Not when Jesus Christ walks the shore as our companion.

When Jesus asked his disciples about the availability of food for 5,000 followers, he received excuses ranging from the economic to the impossible. But Jesus was like a "beachcomber on a mission." His "starfish rescue" was made from the minimal gift of five loaves and two small fish. The point is obvious: in the hands of Jesus there is a difference. Those who give their gifts for his purpose make a difference, no matter how small the gift.

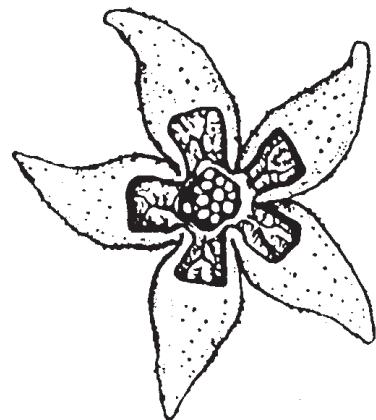
Nothing we do for Jesus is ever done in vain. Jesus did not say, "Satisfy my sheep," or even, "Protect my sheep." He instructed us to feed them.

In my imagination I have always pictured the lad whose lunch was multiplied by the Master, running home and bursting through the door shouting, "Hey, Mom! Guess what me and Jesus did today!"

Such is the spirit of those who know that it does, for certain, "matter to this one." Saving starfish or feeding Christ's sheep—it is what we must do. It does matter. —Daniel John Yeary, at this writing, was pastor of the University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, FL. This meditation is reprinted from Seeds: the Sprouts Edition, Volume 14 No 1, January 1992.

Endnote

1. This illustration was inspired by "The Star Thrower" by Loren Eiseley.



Hygiene Center saved by Rick Steves Land Purchase

Edmonds, WA—Travel writer and TV host Rick Steves recently saved a local community hygiene center, where people with no homes can go to take showers and get access to meals, clothing and medical services. The Lynnwood Hygiene Center is just two blocks from Steves' house, but he never knew it was there, until he heard that it was about to close.

The Jean Kim Foundation, the local nonprofit that ran the center, had a rent-free agreement to use the land, until Sandra Mears, who directs the program, heard that the land was being listed for sale. Mears told a reporter that she was overwhelmed by the thought of packing up the center and trying to find another space. She was frantically trying to piece together something so that the regular guests would not go without these services. She was running into brick walls.

Then Mears received an email from Steves, offering to buy the property. The goodbye party that she was planning turned into a celebration. Steves told Washington Post reporter Kim Bellware that it became a "joyful time."

Rick Steves came to prominence as a travel specialist, with many books and a series on PBS. He said his worldview has been shaped by spending a third of his

life overseas. He has compared how other countries approach issues like homelessness and social services with how the United States does it. He says he remembers backpacking around the world as a young person and knows what it is like to need a shower.

After the land purchase, Steves began spending time at the facility, getting to know the neighbors who rely on it. He posted on Facebook that it was "the best \$2 million I can imagine spending."

In addition to Steves' gift, another donor gave \$250,000 to renovate and enhance the facility.

—from a story by Kim Bellware of the *Washington Post*.

New York Chef Says African Grains Can Save Us

New York, NY—When Marcus Samuelsson visited Ethiopia for the first time since he was 2 years old, he was intrigued by the native grains in the markets. As a chef, he was always on the lookout for tasty, nutritional food. "I picked up a handful of millet and wondered how toasting it might bring out its earthiness, or how slow-cooking it in a rich broth could make it creamy like risotto. This was the start of a decades-long obsession with the foods of my ancestors and my attempts to bring them into my home and onto my menus."

In the years since Samuelsson's trip, the world's agriculture has changed. Flooding in parts of Africa and drought in other areas, both caused by global climate change, have made it difficult to grow traditional global staples like wheat, rice and potatoes. Samuelsson suggests that the African grains that so intrigued him could be the answer to this dilemma. Millet, sorghum and teff are grains that grow well in difficult climates. He goes on to say that these grains are "delicious, nutritious and quick to grow."

Pearl millet, Samuelsson writes, can grow in waterlogged and barren soil. Teff, he says, can regrow even after extreme drought. Fonio, a West African grain related to millet, sprouts quickly, isn't picky about the soil and requires relatively little water.

*A woman processes millet flour in Senegal.
Photo by T. K. Naliaka.*



Samuelsson has been incorporating these grains in foods served in his restaurants in New York City, hoping that they will catch on like quinoa, an Andean staple, did.
—from a *New York Times* article written by Marcus Samuelsson.

Franciscan Sisters Will Return Property to Lac du Flambeau Tribe

Arbor Vitae, WI—The Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) have decided to transfer the property of the Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center in Arbor Vitae to the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, deemed “the original caretakers of the land.”

This marks the first known transfer of land from a Catholic institution to a Tribal Nation as an act of reparations for colonialism and the legacy of mandatory residential schools for Indigenous children.

On October 31, Tribal leaders and representatives from the FSPA will gather at Marywood for a ceremonial signing and blessing to “honor this return and acknowledge the shared commitment to healing, relationship and stewardship of the land.”

—from the Lac du Flambeau Tribe

Rotary International Sponsors Service Club for Youth

Rotary Clubs around the world are sponsoring Interact Clubs for young people aged 12-18, focusing on “leadership development and community service through fun, meaningful projects that benefit schools, communities, and promote international understanding.” There are

Newsfront is continued on page 18.

Providing School-Appropriate Clothing for Unhoused Students

by Ann Sims & Viola Osborn

When the Waco Independent School District (WISD) initiated a school uniform policy more than 15 years ago in Waco, TX, more than 1,400 WISD students were identified as “homeless” according to federal criteria. The families of some of these students lived in shelters or cars, or were new to the district and in housing transition. The number also included children who were living with relatives or “couch surfing.” Initially, a small nonprofit organization called Potter’s Vessel recognized the need to help marginalized families afford the uniforms.

Eventually, Potter’s Vessel was unable to meet the need to supply the uniforms for all the homeless children in the school district. The people of Seventh & James Baptist Church felt the call to fill this need, and began what is now called the “Uniform Ministry.” Uniforms at that time consisted of polo shirts and khakis, both of which were too expensive for these families. At first the Uniform Ministry collected gently used polos and khakis, but, as contributions started pouring in, we were able to purchase polos and khakis for the children who were thrilled to look like everyone else and not be removed from the classroom because of improper dress.

Recently, WISD transitioned to dress “guidelines” for children and the Uniform Ministry was able to provide “school appropriate” clothing instead of polos and khakis. The ministry continues to supply the polos and khakis that are required for the children who must attend the alternative schools. In addition, we began to provide shoes, socks, underwear and cold weather gear, such as coats, for the children identified as homeless. Although we are not able to meet with these families and children for privacy reasons, we hear stories of parents with tears of gratitude and children with smiles when they receive new clothes with sales tags still on them and new sneakers still in boxes. WISD has gathered data indicating that the graduation rate among these children is higher when they are able to dress like everyone else and not miss classroom instruction because of clothing issues.

Jesus was pretty specific about clothing the poor, and participation in this ministry has been a blessing to our church. It is overwhelming to live in a world and in a community where the needs are so great that we constantly struggle with our inadequacy to solve the issues. But being able to make a difference in one small area is what we are called to do, and we are blessed to have this opportunity.

—Ann Sims (a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards) and Viola Osborn are part of the School Uniform Ministry team at Seventh & James. They and other team members spend hours each week sorting through clothing and filling orders for the WISD schools.

more than 10,000 Interact Clubs in more than 100 countries.

Each club is self-governing but sponsored by a local Rotary Club. Each is responsible for completing at least two projects each year. One is to be local and the other is to have an international focus.

These groups reach into even the smallest communities. One example is Shamrock, TX, a town with about 1,700 people and about 350 students in its school system. Its newly formed Interact Club, led by high-school senior Taylor Cook and junior Sophia Engle, boasts 35 members. One of its local projects is volunteering for Meals on Wheels, an agency that provides delivered meals to seniors, and with which most of our readers are familiar.

The Shamrock Interact Club's international project last year was raising funds for ShelterBox, an international organization that provides emergency shelter, tools and household supplies to displaced families after disasters. ShelterBox is a partner of Rotary International.

-Sources: Rotary International, ShelterBox, Shamrock Rotary Club, *Irish Star News*.

Austin Company Works to Print Affordable, Climate-Sustainable 3-DHouses

Austin, TX—Jason Ballard grew up in Orange, TX, where hurricanes frequently force evacuations. Growing up, his family was evacuated during five hurricanes. He began training for priesthood but changed to conservation biology and earned a master's degree in space resources. But, seeing the current housing crisis, he decided, instead of becoming a priest or an astronaut, he would stay in Texas and develop housing.

The result of this was that Ballard joined two others, Alex Le Roux and Evan Loomis, to found ICON, a construction technology company based in Austin, TX, that focuses on printing 3-D houses. The founders saw three main problems in construction of houses. First, it is expensive. Second, materials have become scarce. And third, there is a shortage of skilled workers. The construction of 3-D homes, according to ICON, is cheaper, faster and requires fewer workers than traditional construction.

The Lady at the Whataburger

by Ashley Bean Thornton

There's a homeless woman who sometimes hangs out at the Baylor Whataburger¹ the same time of day as I do. It's easy for me to get focused on how annoying and loud she is. I don't think I even realized it at the time, but as she was packing up to leave this morning, I'm pretty sure I was darkly thinking to myself, "Yes! Please go!"

As she was walking her loud self out the door, Allen, the Whataburger guy, looked up from the cash register and said, "You be careful out there today."

"Thanks," she said. "You too."

It's easy and even necessary sometimes to get focused on ourselves (myself) and what we (I) need and what's bugging us (me). I'm not going to beat myself up for getting annoyed. I imagine most people would have felt the same way—annoyed. She is REALLY loud and sometimes pretty angry sounding and a little scary.

Thank goodness for Allen. I know he deals with this particular person more often than I do. He has more reason to be annoyed than I do. But you could tell even in those few words he spoke as she was leaving that he did really wish the best for her.

He probably wouldn't even know what I was talking about if I said something about this little exchange. He's just a nice guy doing his nice thing like he does just about every minute of every day.

But he made me a little better person for at least a minute or two today. He reminded me, without even trying to, that we are all just trying to get along the best we can, and it's not that hard to give each other a little grace.

Thanks, Allen.

Y'all be careful out there today.

—Ashley Bean Thornton is a community organizer and a former member of the Seeds Council of Stewards.

Endnote

1. This is the Whataburger located just across Interstate 35 from the Baylor University campus in Waco, TX.

The company builds other 3-D objects, but focused early on building affordable, well insulated, climate-sustainable housing that is durable enough to stand through fire, wind, hurricanes and earthquakes.

ICON, which plans to expand to Miami, FL, has built the 100-home Wolf Ranch in Georgetown, TX—the world's only community made up entirely 3-D houses. Each of these houses was built in three weeks or less. The company has also built 100 other houses in five states and two countries. It has even built army barracks.

In addition to luxury homes in affluent communities surrounding Austin, ICON has printed 60 tiny homes for unhoused people at the First Village Community in Austin (see the story on page 6) and plans to print 60 more.

—from a *New York Times* story by Deborah Kamin

Red Door Pantry, continued from page 5

from my trunk, when I heard a gentle voice behind me say, "Excuse me." I turned around to someone with the tanned face that's common among unhoused folks who spend hours on street corners holding up a sign that says, "Hungry. Please help. God bless!"

After sharing with me about the rough spot he had been going through, he asked if I would pray for him. So I did, after which, I asked if he was hungry. Yes, he was. So I gave him a loaf of bread, some peanut butter, and some jelly, which he gratefully accepted.

As I continued to unload the trunk of my car, I saw him look toward the brambles that separate our church's parking lot from our neighbor and heard him give a sharp whistle and call a name. *Maybe his dog*, I thought. No, it was an emaciated young woman, with a face covered with sores, crawling out from the shrubs.

Not wanting to stare, I continued with my task. And when I came out of the church next, I saw him kneeling before her on the street curb offering her a sandwich. It looked like a tableau from a Christmas nativity scene. Or maybe someone proposing marriage on bended knee. I knew at once that I had been given a glimpse of something sacred and holy. And I was grateful for it.

I have been privileged with the opportunity to get to know and care passionately for some of the folks who use our food pantries. It's a wild assortment of people: a gang member who tentatively joins us for Sunday morning worship, a woman who chalks our sidewalk asking for prayers for her dog who is sick, a woman who lives in a tent and scavenges dumpsters for a living, an HIV-positive man asking for deliveries to the park because he is unhoused at the moment. They are beautiful, broken people. But aren't we all? Some of us just manage to hide our brokenness better than others.

—*Charley Garrison is pastor of the Central Texas Metropolitan Community Church in Waco, TX, and a frequent contributor to Seeds publications. He is a longtime anti-hunger activist and is active in a variety of community efforts to aid vulnerable people.*

Endnote

1. HIV refers to human immunodeficiency viruses that, untreated, can develop into acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS. A person diagnosed as having the HIV viruses is considered to be HIV-positive.



Above: A child adds food to the Li'l Free Pantry at the Central Texas Metropolitan Church in Waco. Photo by his mother, Becky Shumake.

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Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

The struggle against hunger is not fought in one cataclysmic battle. There is no "magic bullet" and no hunger monster to slay. Pushing back hunger is more like reclaiming the sea. Just as dikes, pumps and time draw new boundaries between saltwater and farmland, hunger is defeated by a well here, a health clinic there, an agricultural cooperative, a new piece of legislation, a soup kitchen down the block. Like the dikes, all can be lost quickly when we forget simple, recurring, unglamorous tasks. There's a lot of useful work to be done....

—Gary Gunderson



art by Peter Yuichi Clark

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry people in God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group seeks out people of faith who feel called to care for poor and vulnerable people; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

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Seeds also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for Advent, Lent and an annual Hunger Emphasis—with an attitude "toward justice, peace and food security for all of God's children." These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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