



## Divine Savior Spring Social Justice Series....Week 3

### Catholic Social Teaching: Option for the Poor & Vulnerable

Just as the Apostles, in Acts 6:1-7, were called to help those most in need, even from a people that were not former Jews, but Gentiles, we are called to help those most in need whoever they are.

The poor, the elderly, those on the margins are all present in our own community. Let us all think how we can help improve the lives of our neighbors.

About 7 years ago, Divine Savior Parish offered its parishioners the opportunity to gather in small groups for faith sharing. The topic of some of these groups was “Becoming a Good Samaritan”. After completing the course, we were taken with the idea of serving food to the needy in our community. How could we do that? Helping locally, Orangevale Food Bank, was an option that some parishioners had taken on. Another was to have a “soup kitchen”. With some research, we found that Orangevale had two other churches serving free dinners on Tuesday and Wednesday. We decided to make it three by a dinner at our parish on Thursdays. After months of meetings and planning, we were ready and able to begin serving meals. This took time, education, manpower and much leg work, but we stuck with it and are now in our 6th year of serving meals. Those in need in our greater community can benefit from food and companionship every Thursday evening.

Divine Savior’s Community Meal Ministry (CMM) takes a slightly different approach to providing meals for those in need. Instead of requiring our guests to wait in line for dinner (cafeteria style), they enter and take a seat in our dining hall, wherever they’d like. Some homeless guests live in their cars and are disabled as well. We have at least two regular guests who need help getting from their cars and into the dining hall. Many of our guests have formed a tight-knit community, and watch out for each other, even showing concern if someone doesn’t show up.

After saying grace and recognizing birthdays with song, we randomly choose a row of tables and begin serving our guests dinner. Volunteers serve our guests where they are seated. They are offered coffee, milk, lemonade, a main course, seconds if desired, and dessert. After our guests are served, volunteers may sit and have a meal with our guests. When dinner is over, we clear their plates and wish them a blessed week. Serving our guests, in this way, is our way of treating them with dignity and respect. Something they may seldom receive.

The hospitality aspect of this event goes beyond a smile, handshake and sometimes a hug. We offer a lending library, with books for young and old. We have been able to offer warm socks, toiletries, and sometimes clothes. Members of St. Vincent DePaul have been able to provide sleeping bags to a few in need. And, now that the Giving Garden is, once again, producing wonderful fruits and vegetables, we include them in the Thursday meals and offer extra to our guests to take home.

Many guests thank God for the companionship and food they receive. Everyone at the meal is blessed, both those receiving and those giving.

“We serve dignity, along with a hot meal”

Over 150 volunteers make this possible by giving their time! If you ever wonder how you can make a difference, you don’t need to focus on what is in your pocket, think about what is in your heart. Where can you invest your time to help the Poor and Vulnerable? Divine Savior has many ministries and opportunities to serve.

