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New book reveals stories of the poor

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I always enjoy when Brother Vincent Reyes comes for tea because I know he'll share stories of the poor he serves at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. Father Solanus Casey and the friars started feeding the hungry there in 1929. Even though I've visited both locations in Detroit, I've never had the opportunity to speak with the guests as Reyes likes to call them. Maybe it's the journalist in me or simply the human being that wants to know how they end up at the soup kitchen.

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Reyes made a promise when he came to Detroit in 1998 to get to know the poor by eating with them but it wasn't until he decided to tell their stories through photographs that he learned some have been coming to the soup kitchen since they were children. One man wakes up everyday under a bridge. Reyes recorded them all after each was photographed by him and photojournalists Ed Haun and Chip Somodevilla of the Detroit Free Press, and Elizabeth Conley and Steve Perez of the Detroit News. The all-volunteer project took more than three years to complete. The book, My Name Is, was recently released by Wayne State University Press. Proceeds go to the soup kitchen.



Anthony or "P" got lost in the ha 1976. He used to Capuchin Soup l neck to show he

Willie Pearl sa God."

Sarah came fr beat her mother Sarah came to C her in Selma, Al

John is a skill born in Grosse F of a heart attack

"As pastor of the soup kitchen I had to go out and tell the story of the soup kitchen about why and what

we were doing," said Reyes. "People were becoming glassy eyed with the numbers, the 3 1/2 million pounds of food we provide to families a year, 55,000 to 60,000 meals a month to hungry people. I needed to humanize the numbers, to put a face on the poor."

More importantly he needed to give them a name. Anthony or "Pops" is a graduate of Wayne State University who lost his way through a haze of heroin until one day in 1976 he asked for God's help. Today he wrestles with a new demon, dementia.

"No one ever asks the poor what their name is," said Reyes who grew up in a poor family in Gary, Ind. "It's a matter of empowering them. It's not a story of this terrible life but people who had a great sense of faith. 'Pops' is on the cover. When I gave the book to him in the dining room of the soup kitchen, he said 'now I won't be forgotten.' Alfredia on the back (cover) got caught up in drugs. It's an addiction. They don't know how to do anything about it. I got a chance to listen to people in a different way and give people a glimpse into the reality of the poor. They leave no shadow in society. People walk by. My life has been richer because of them. I would hear again and again, 'I'm blessed' and I knew they slept on the streets."

The poor are one of the reasons Reyes became a friar in 1961. Since then he's served as a retreat director in St. Clair, an emergency room chaplain in a Chicago hospital and a photographer documenting the Capuchin's South American missions. Today, he's working on a project to tell the story of the novices taking their vows Aug. 2. Like him, they see themselves as making a difference.

Beth Collison learned about Reyes and the book while working with the Capuchin's Reaching Our Potential Everyday program that teaches baking skills to men who have spent time in jail. Collison purchases the breads, cookies, pies and muffins to serve to customers at the Faith At Work Catholic book store/coffee house in Troy. The nonprofit opened March 13. Reyes was the first book signing on May 17.

"I love the book because you can truly hear the person speaking as you read it," said Collison. "Their stories are faith-filled, inspirational. They really are just rich."

My Name Is costs \$25 and is available at Faith at Work, 1977 E. Wattles and through Wayne State University Press (wsupress.wayne.edu, click on Detroit). For signed copies, call Reyes at (734) 579-2100, ext. 203. Reyes is also available to speak at parishes or for book signings.

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