

The History of Lighthouse Mission

By Sister Elaine Bohrer

The Lighthouse Mission began in 1992. However, the real beginning was in the thoughts and heart of God since the beginning of time. As I look back now, I realize that the Holy Spirit prepared me in advance for the work that was to take place in the future. The Lord had a purpose and a plan for my life. I accepted, yielded, and surrendered to that call. I had a vision to feed the poor, and God filled me with His glory, anointing, and power to get the job done. When you know your calling and step out in faith, the provision will always follow. All you need to have is a willing heart and to be available when God tells you to go.

Born in 1937, I was raised in Queens with my sister by two loving parents. I was shy and unsure of myself. I had no confidence at all in my ability to do anything on my own, and so I became totally codependent on people. I share this with you so you will see that God took an ordinary person and did something extraordinary.

I didn't receive Christ as my Lord and Savior until 1977 during a church service. My life would never be the same. Over the next twelve years, a lot happened in my life. I became a widow, and I grew closer to Christ. He became a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (Psalm 119:105) and the truth of God's Word set me free indeed. Knowing God loved me for who I was, and not for what people wanted me to be, changed my life.

I began to pray, asking God to send me to Bible school, because I wanted to learn more about Him and His Word. God answered my prayer and I was able to attend Bible school for two years.

One thing I learned while I was there was to never quit, never be discouraged, nor dismayed, but instead to keep my eyes on Jesus and go forward. Step by step He led me. I was being filled with His love, joy, and peace. What freedom I began to experience! What truth I was learning! “If so be that you have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the *truth is in Jesus*” (Ephesians 4:21, KJV).

My family began to notice that something was different in my life. Old things in my life started to disappear and a new person began to emerge. The truth I found in the Bible about Jesus Christ was transforming me daily into His image. I soon began to pray, “Father, not my will but yours be done.”

One afternoon I stood on my back porch when Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, spoke to my heart: “I am calling you out alone. Will you follow Me?” I realized immediately what He meant. My time would no longer be my own. I stood for a moment and pondered the question. Jesus told me a while before this, “If you follow Me you won’t be disappointed or ashamed.”

“Yes, Lord. I will follow you.”

I wasn’t quite sure what Jesus had in mind, but I was willing to serve Him with my whole heart. I can truly say that along my journey in life with Jesus, the Word of God has always been sufficient to sustain me. The Bible assures us that we should not be afraid because God holds and leads us by His right hand. When you walk with the King you walk in the Kingdom of God here on earth. What is the Kingdom of God? “For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17, KJV).

I had no idea what was about to take place. It is a good thing the Holy Spirit didn't reveal the next ten years to me, because I think I would have run from the high calling of God. There is one thing I have learned over the years. When you follow in the footsteps of Jesus, you never know what you will be doing next. But God's grace is always sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). This was good news for me. The Holy Spirit has reminded me often that the job gets done by the power of His Word. It is not who I am, but *who I am in Christ!*

The Vision

Early one morning in 1992, I was standing in my bedroom when I saw in big, black, bold letters, "GO FEED THE POOR." Those words landed in my heart and were engraved there forever. I immediately began to pray, "What do I do now, Lord?" I waited patiently for the answer to come. My journey was off to an exciting beginning. Days passed, and I reminded God that I was waiting for an answer. A week passed. "Jesus, you told me to go feed the poor, but I need to know what to do." Two weeks later I came to the conclusion that I wasn't going to hear from the Holy Spirit on this matter. "Did God think I had an idea?" Well, maybe so. I knew I was commissioned to *go*, so that's what I decided to do.

I made my first commitment to this vision by declaring, "Lord, I will make ten bologna and cheese sandwiches every week and give them to people I see on the streets who look like they are in need." This was something I felt I was capable of doing by myself. I didn't have to depend upon people to help make the ten bologna and cheese sandwiches. I was still shy and insecure, and I had led a lifestyle of codependency, not

being able to make decisions without the help of others. So, this was a major step in my life. However, a fire was burning in my heart to feed the poor. A desire to serve Jesus Christ drove me to my knees to ask for God's help. I was determined to fulfill my calling. The vision I saw to feed the poor was a driving force in my life. My journey had begun.

In January of 1992, I drove to some of the poorer communities, from Bay Shore to Bellport, looking for people who might be hungry. I would see someone pushing a shopping cart and jump out of my car with the sandwiches and ask, "Would you like a sandwich?" They always said yes. I would then give them a sandwich, say, "God loves you," and hurry back into my car.

While I was praying at the altar one day, Jesus spoke these words, "I have set a course before you. Just follow me." As God calls you, He equips you to do the work. "Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24, KJV).

For a while I thought that I would be handing out ten bologna and cheese sandwiches every week for the rest of my life, and that was fine with me! I didn't realize that God was strengthening my faith at the time, but as I look back, He was clearly doing so. Until I grew stronger in Christ Jesus, the ten bologna and cheese sandwiches each week was all I could handle. However, as God's Word came alive in my heart, I realized that telling others about the love of Jesus Christ, and giving others the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God, was the most important thing in the world, so I began sharing the gospel as I handed out food.

Six months later, people from church heard I was feeding the poor and asked if they could go with me. Everyone wanted to contribute something. One brought coffee, another cake, and we came up with all sorts of other ways to bless people. The crowds began to

gather in a parking lot in Patchogue. At one point the crowd grew so large that we were told by the Village police that we would have to meet on private property or they would have to take action. That event led us to the building we now occupy, where we pay one dollar a month for rent. At the time, this dilapidated building needed a complete restoration. God was faithful to provide for the complete restoration of the building and it became our headquarters for the next 14 years. He sent people to help who had a heart to feed the poor and the skills to do all the construction work. The work took place over several years at very little cost.

God is good all the time.

Joining Together

Over the years the Holy Spirit began to connect me with other people who had a similar passion to feed the poor. In fact, a steady stream of available people joined with me each week to help me fulfill the vision from above. As the ministry began to unfold, the Lord began to test my faith. Yet I never doubted for a moment my high calling from God to feed the poor—not even when we went driving around and couldn't find a single hungry person to feed. I knew that God wanted me to trust Him to overcome my shyness and I saw this as being part of the process. I chose to believe that Jesus was leading me without any proof of where I was going.

The ministry of feeding the poor eventually became known as the Lighthouse Mission. We began our foundation on the scripture verse, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of Hosts” (Zechariah 4:6, KJV). To this day it is the Lord's ministry and it is under His leadership. Over the years we began to network with

people and other agencies to get people the help they needed. God showed me that He wanted us to touch many lives and to be a beacon of hope for Him—not just to those who are “poor” materially but to the lost in general.

Thousands of people have come through our doors and to our mobile outreaches over the years. We take the opportunity to share Jesus—His love, hope, and free gift of salvation—with every person who comes to the Mission or to our outreaches, with every volunteer, every businessperson, whomever we come into contact with. The Lord has shown us that these people, when they become saved, need to be discipled. This has led to Bible studies and a host of other ministries.

We have more than 100 dedicated volunteers who help make all of this happen—everyone from truck drivers who make food pickups to volunteers who sort clothes and make sandwiches, to faithful servants who minister at our outreaches. And we continue to join with more churches, ministries, organizations, businesses, and people in general. The Bible says to work together in the unity of faith, having the mind of Christ, and we’ve tried to do that at the Mission.

Press On

The Lighthouse Mission operates strictly by faith. One’s faith becomes strong by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Not knowing what God has planned for the future, or how He will supply our needs, our ministry requires a faith that is strong in the scriptures. On a daily basis we believe the Holy Spirit will send people to the Mission and He always does.

God tested my heart many times over the years. Was I willing to give up more and more of my time to meet the needs of others? When no one else was there to help was I willing to do the work myself? Was I ready to make another commitment to God to continue to fulfill the vision of feeding the poor?

There were days when I woke up and said, “Lord, the ministry is getting too big for me. You know I can’t handle all this.” The Holy Spirit would gently remind me, “Everything is going to be all right. God is in charge and will give you the wisdom and favor you need to press on and get the job done.” How can I argue with my Father?

I have often been faced with problems in ministry where it took a step of faith to press on. I remember one particular time when God used a man named Juan to teach me a lesson. Juan was part of the ministry as we went out on the streets of Patchogue to feed the homeless and hungry. Each week men, women, and children waited in a parking lot to receive donated food, along with the message of God’s love. One day we found ourselves with very little food to share with the people. Juan said, “We don’t have enough food in our pantry to take to the people.”

Our motto at the Lighthouse Mission has always been, “Take what you have and use it!” However, Juan stood firm, “Since we don’t have enough food to give out, I’m not going.” I knew I needed his help, so I didn’t know what to do. I prayed and the reply came quickly. “God will supply our need.” We’d only promised the people a sandwich, drink, and donut. Any other food would be extra for them. So I decided to go. Just as we were getting ready to leave for the streets, the Mission received an unexpected delivery of food. We all learned to trust God a little more that day.

I've had to press on when a mayor shook his finger in my face and said, "How long do you think it would take to shut you down?" (The mayor didn't know that God was about to have His way.) I've needed to press on when people from the streets came to the Mission and didn't get their own way and started to scream and argue. I've had to press on more times than I can count when there was no money to pay bills.

The Christian has been called to walk by faith and not by sight. Over the years of being in ministry, walking by faith has become a way of life for me. True faith is true trust and obedience to stand on God's promises. First, hearing from the Holy Spirit, and then obeying the plans and purposes of God.

God's Provision

With the calling to any ministry, comes the miracle of God's provision. I could never tell you about all the miracles that have happened in my years of ministry. The Lord started the Lighthouse Mission with a vision to feed the poor. With that calling came God's promise to meet all our needs. He promised me that we would not want financially, nor would we lack food to feed the poor. God also, by His spirit, has always touched the hearts of people to volunteer at the Mission when a job needed to be done or to give a large financial donation when we desperately needed it.

Four times in the life of this ministry a person has given me \$10,000. Each time was a miracle of God's provision at a time we desperately needed it. Over the years, hundreds and hundreds of people have come and gone, all playing a role in furthering God's kingdom through this ministry.

The Mission continues to grow in leaps and bounds. As we await finances we need from week to week, my thought remains the same: There is nothing I can do except to stand in faith. It is God's Mission. He will supply our need according to His will.

Lord, Help!

In 2000, eight years after the Lighthouse Mission began, I was crying out to God, "Lord, help!" I found myself in a place where I had no control. The Mission was growing and nothing was stopping God's plans and purposes. I kept hearing people speak the following God-given words over the Mission, "It is only the beginning of what I am going to do." At that point in my life, I could not imagine what else the Lord could add to the work we were already doing. The Mission's programs had grown in number and in size—more than I thought I could handle.

We needed more people to join our staff and more volunteers. I was involved in helping people seven days a week. I prayed, "Lord, help! This is much too big for me. I have nothing to offer to keep going forward in the plans you have for the Lighthouse Mission."

"My child, you have my love to give. Operate in my love and I will do the rest," came the soft, sweet answer from above.

My first commission from God was to feed the poor, but in that calling God had a much bigger plan. God has done abundantly above what I could imagine or think. In the next five years He would establish several other programs, including Hannah House, our women's recovery home, and another outreach, Victory House in Bay Shore. This home

is where a couple from the Mission resides to reach out with the love and light of God to those living in the darkness of a neighborhood beset by drugs, crime, and prostitution.

Changing Lives

Lighthouse Mission is open seven days a week. Prayer and Bible study are part of our daily routine. People come from all over the world to share their testimony and to share the Word of God. In the early years of ministry the Holy Spirit impressed upon my heart that people in crisis situations need to change their thinking. This is why we always share the Word of God, the Gospel, at our outreaches. When people's minds become renewed according to scripture, then their behavior will change. As their behavior changes, then they will be able to make right choices to help improve their quality of life. The joy of serving Jesus at the Mission is sharing His love and seeing Him transform the lives of thousands of people as they find joy and hope.

During the week, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, people of all walks of life can attend our outreaches at various outdoor locations to receive food and, most important, to hear God's Word. We even have an emergency food pantry. Our Friday food outreach follows a worship service and a Gospel message in our building. Clothing is also available to those in need. Whatever is donated to the Mission is freely given out, including baby items, small pieces of furniture, and household necessities. A faithful volunteer runs our furniture ministry to people in need. Some people show up here simply because they are lonely and need someone to talk to. Many people we've helped say that the staff of our ministry showed them that someone really cares about them. Some say we became the family they never had.

Today we have seven food street outreaches throughout Suffolk County. We go into poor neighborhoods to bring God's love and food—feeding more than 1,400 people per week. In order to empower the poor rather than just feed them, we also bring resources and information that can help them find housing and jobs, and meet other urgent needs.

On Saturdays, we conduct a children's ministry that attracts anywhere between 50 and 75 children from ages four to eleven. They come to have fun and to learn about Jesus. We have our own large school bus, which was donated to us, to pick up most of these children, who are homeless and live in shelters. Hundreds of volunteers—from the Girl Scouts to church youth groups—come to minister to the children every week. It is one of my greatest joys to see their lives transformed by the love of God.

People who come to the Mission usually have greater needs than just food, so we often counsel them. We offer a listening ear and the one-on-one attention and spiritual guidance they need to get back on their feet again after a tragedy or crisis. We do our best to help people find housing, jobs, and direction in life.

Our warehouse often overflows because of God's abundant supply of food. We now distribute 700,000 pounds of food every year—some to other soup kitchens and food pantries throughout Suffolk County. In fact, we are in need of a much larger warehouse. Our refrigerated/freezer trailer stores perishable food (we are one of very few food pantries that supply people in need with meat, when available). Two box trucks serve to pick up and deliver our donated food.

Three annual programs have been growing each year as well: the Mission provides free back-to-school supplies to hundreds of children every August; Thanksgiving meals are given out to thousands of families each November; and finally, thousands of

Christmas gifts and toys are given to parents in need every December. Other special events take place regularly as well.

Arise and Go

I had ten bologna and cheese sandwiches and committed to give them out on a weekly basis. God just kept blessing my efforts and faithfulness to keep my commitment to Him. I never dreamed the Lighthouse Mission would grow into a ministry bigger than I could ever imagine. The Bible tells us, “Don’t despise small beginnings” (Zech. 4:10). Last year we fed more than 64,000 people. It all started with my ten sandwiches.

What can you offer to God? The Holy Spirit has reminded me often that the job gets done by the power of His Word. It is not who I am, but *who I am in Christ!* Be encouraged! Jesus also has a journey He wants to take you on. God wants to take you, an ordinary person, and do something extraordinary!

Editor’s Note:

*As the Founder and President of Lighthouse Mission, Sister Elaine was honored and recognized in three special ways for the Mission’s dedication to serving the poor. First, she was named Brookhaven Town Woman of the Year in 2004. Then in 2005 the New York State Senate honored her as a New York State Woman of Distinction. Her leadership and the Lighthouse Mission ministry received special recognition on exhibit in the state capitol as part of this honor. Finally, the Jesus Alive ministry honored her as a “Doer of the Word.” Sister Elaine wrote this chapter in 2006 for the book **Doers of the***

Word by Gloria Schuck (published in 2009). On June 26, 2007, Sister Elaine went home to be forever with Jesus, the God she so faithfully served.