

How The Salvation Army transforms bingo from a game into a ministry

The Santa Clarita Valley (California) Corps offers a weekly respite for community members experiencing homelessness.

Suspense mounted at [The Salvation Army Santa Clarita Valley \(California\) Corps](#) as numbers were announced: O-61, B-10, G-53. Someone was close to yelling “Bingo!”

Each Wednesday afternoon, the corps hosts this bingo game. It’s not a women’s ministry or a seniors’ group; instead, it includes men and women of various ages who are experiencing homelessness. A dozen or more people usually attend.

Manny won this round, receiving a \$10 In-N-Out gift card. The prize for the next round was a Del Taco gift card.

The corps holds space for this weekly ministry, a love offering from community member Diep (Zip) Francis, who volunteers her time. “It’s a calling,” she said. “I have a heart for the underdog.”

Francis, who attends a local Catholic church, has been serving those experiencing homelessness for 12 years. A retired hair stylist, she also offers free haircuts at the corps once a month.

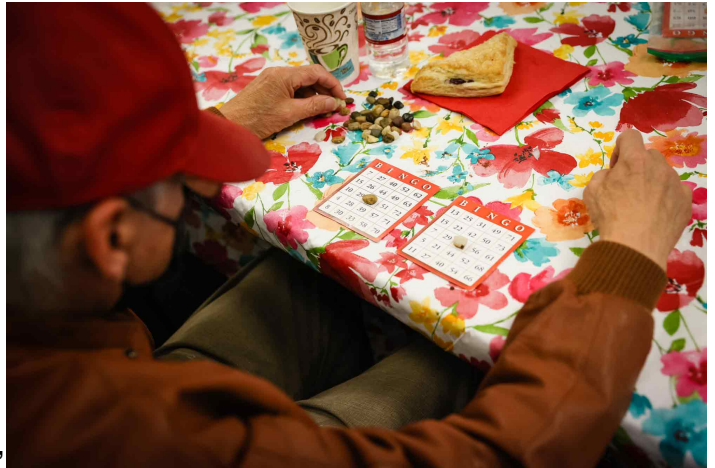




Photo by John Docter.

“I try to be a resource for [those experiencing homelessness],” she said. “If they need anything—a blanket, a backpack—they call me.”

Not only does Francis show up each week with bingo supplies and prizes—often fast-food gift cards—she also brings a homemade meal, which, for some, might be the only meal of the day.

“Today I brought spicy Thai food,” she said. “That hot meal means a lot to them.”

David Moore knows the importance of a hot meal firsthand. Once homeless, he received help from The Salvation Army and is now employed and an active Salvation Army adherent.

“When you’re homeless, it’s a full-time job just getting a meal,” he said.

Moore takes credit for connecting Francis with The Salvation Army—he introduced her to then-Santa Clarita Valley Officer In-Charge Envoy Laura Ann-Bloom Moore, who told Francis she was welcome

to bring her ministry to the corps.

“I’d been searching for a place where I could bring my services to,” Francis said. She’d been holding bingo at the local metro station, where many people experiencing homelessness congregate.

Francis engages the bingo participants in various ways. Whoever wins a game gets to choose the bingo pattern for the next game. “This time we’re doing b-i-n-g-o in a z-pattern,” she said. “It takes longer this way...Bingo brings joy to my clients. It’s the fun of it. The winning part—it’s a joy.”

Spencer, a participant, agreed that winning is the best part of the game.

“I’m pretty lucky. I inherited that from my mother,” he said.

As Francis engages group members, the bingo game metamorphosizes into a ministry. “She spends a lot of time talking to them,” Bloom Moore said. “She witnesses to them.”



Photo by John Docter.

On this Wednesday, she thanked those who had prayed for a friend of hers, Tina, and gave an update on her situation. Later she shared a job opening she knew of for a handyman.

The bingo group's afternoon meeting came after a typically busy morning at the Santa Clarita Valley Corps, which distributes food to those in need four days a week—Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"Today, we served 31 families already, and it's only 12:30," said volunteer Dorenda Smith, adding that the corps averages about 1,000 clients every month. Volunteers [keep the food distribution going](#). "We have five here now; and we had five more here this morning," Smith said. Volunteers include community members and young missionaries from [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#). Additionally, several volunteers are clients who want to give back in gratitude for the help they received.

"These are the people who do the work—[the volunteers](#)," Bloom Moore said.

The Salvation Army and its partners are committed to providing a hand up, not just a hand-out. They do what they can.

"And that is enough," Francis said. "I've come to realize that I cannot change the person; no matter what I do or say, it has to be coming from themselves. But as long as I can, I can provide love and affection and friendship."

She said she believes God intended to bring her together with The Salvation Army to better meet the [needs of the homeless community](#). "[Bloom Moore] had the resources [the space] I needed and now people know they can come to get some food, clothing whatever they may need. If they have it, she gives it to them."

Both look to the future, to a time when the corps might offer a soup kitchen.

"It's a great partnership," Bloom Moore said. "We're on the same mission. We serve Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and we want to reach the people. And the most important thing is they know that the Lord loves them, and that there's people that he uses to show that he loves and cares about them."

Do Good:

- Have you ever found yourself wanting to volunteer but unsure of what to do or how to go about it? Here's the key: You can make an impact in the Fight for Good with whatever time and skills you have. Whatever your interest, there is a *you-sized* need for goodness in the world. [Get the guide on How To Be An Impactful Volunteer](#) with 9 habits to make a difference when giving back.
- Start your day with goodness. [Get on the list for Good Words from the Good Word](#) and get a boost of inspiration in 1 minute a day with a daily affirmation from Scripture sent straight to your

inbox. A pep-talk for the day. A boost of inspiration and comfort. A bit of encouragement when you need it. Get on the list and start receiving what you need today.

- Read more about [the evolution of the Santa Clarita Valley Corps.](#)