



Lamb's Ministry helps poor to a place at church's Thanksgiving table



[Steve Rees](#), Boulder Christianity Examiner

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BOULDER – When Ron Cobbley joins several hundred people for a free meal at First Presbyterian Church on Thursday, the formerly homeless man will have earned his Thanksgiving dinner through years of service to Boulder's poor and needy.

Like many homeless and working poor, Cobbley will give thanks to God for The Lamb's Ministry, a faith-based, Christian outreach meeting spiritual and physical needs with money and support from a handful of Boulder churches.

While Cobbley is grateful for prayer, food and clothes, he's most thankful for his "job" as a core staff member with The Lamb's Ministry. The "position" offers a small stipend for his labors and a huge dose of dignity.

Lamb's Ministry supporters include Cobbley's home church, First Presbyterian, which provides space, finances and volunteers to the independent, non-profit corporation. The ministry's tax-exempt status allows it to offer a stipend to three core staff members.

The respect Cobbley is shown by his bosses - the ministry's board members - and the acceptance of Cobbley's church family at First Presbyterian have opened up a world he didn't know existed beyond Boulder.

Through his "earnings" from the ministry and other sources, Cobbley has raised enough funds to travel to Haiti on a missions trip – his first trek outside the United States - in February 2012 with a team from Boulder's Cornerstone Church, one of several that support The Lamb's Ministry.

Besides his service to First Presbyterian and The Lamb's Ministry, Cobbley also staffs "warming centers" inside Boulder churches during winter months.

In addition to First Presbyterian's annual turkey and trimmings dinner from 1 to 3 p.m. Thanksgiving Day, the church is home to the Lamb's Lunch, a free hot meal that's served on Saturdays from November to April, culminating with the Boulder Footwash in which volunteers wash the feet of homeless men and women on Palm (Saturday). The weekly meal is accompanied by Christian music and a Bible message from church volunteers, and new clothes for those who need them.

On Thursday's, the Lamb's Cafe and Deacon's Closet offer free, hot breakfasts and clothes from inside First Presbyterian Church facilities. The Cafe is also a ministry of The Lamb's Ministry, and the clothes bank is sponsored by the church.

It's at the weekly Lamb's Lunch that Cobbley and two other formerly homeless staff members earn stipends for their work at the weekly gathering. Almost 100 people visit the Lamb's Lunch on Saturdays for music, a message and a meal in First Presbyterian Church's basement.

"Trusted friends" is how the wife of The Lamb's Ministry [president] Gene Culbertson describes Cobbley, Vern Ward and Merrin Heckler who serve as manager, cook and greeter for six months of Saturdays.

"I've seen change," said Linn Culbertson of the ministry's three core staffers. "They're becoming who God made them to be, and less of some kind of stereotype," said Culbertson, a First Presbyterian member and ministry volunteer.

Elsi Dodge, a longtime homeless ministry volunteer from Boulder Valley Christian Church, agrees.

“We’ve seen major life transformations,” said Dodge, pointing to staffers’ church and ministry involvement.

Calvary Bible Church member and Lamb’s Ministry volunteer Jenny Evans believes the success of Cobbley and other ex-homeless staffers, some of whom admit to prior problems with alcohol, is due to “a right relationship with God” and a pledge to pray for one another.

“We’re trying to create community as much as providing an outreach,” said First Presbyterian Church member Ryan Kirkpatrick. “We want them to develop their spiritual life by inviting them into spiritual community.”

While Cobbley thinks it’s a small minority of people whose lives are touched by the ministry - the vast majority he says are looking for a handout - area churches believe they’re fulfilling the Biblical mandate to care for the disadvantaged by feeding and clothing the homeless and working poor.

With contributions from Calvary Bible Church, Boulder Valley Christian, and First Presbyterian, 26 “guests” received 20 pairs of jeans and long underwear, one pair of gloves, hat and jacket, and six sweatshirts on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, said Kirkpatrick, secretary to The Lamb’s Ministry board.

Wearing new jeans or not, each guest is welcome to return for the church-sponsored community Thanksgiving Dinner, said Kirkpatrick’s mother, Jan, a deacon and ministry volunteer.

Following the clothes distribution, volunteers from Christ Church in Louisville played and sang praise and worship songs while 74 guests filled themselves with a chicken and vegetable stew, dubbed ‘Thanksgiving casserole’ by one man who returned for seconds. Traditional Thanksgiving dressing, a green salad and dessert brownie rounded out the meal, prepared by church deacons.

“It’s my desire that you might give him (God) thanks today,” said John Mier, who provided lead vocals and offered a short Thanksgiving message and prayer.

Quoting from the Psalms and New Testament, Mier highlighted King David’s thanks in Psalms 100 and a leper’s gratitude at being healed by Jesus Christ in Luke 17:11-16.

Mier, joined on stage by his wife Cheryl, son Justin and band member Jeremy, invited audience members to invite Jesus Christ into their hearts as Lord and Savior. Mier then prayed for people who had submitted handwritten requests, including one for comfort of a homeless woman whose family member had died.

“No matter what happens – even in the midst of where they’re at – God blesses them,” Mier said. “There are people all over the place who are willing to help them. God hasn’t forgotten them.”

In place of Thursday’s Lamb’s Cafe and Deacon’s Closet outreaches, the church will open its doors to the community at 1 p.m. In excess of 300 guests are expected for a traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner with trimmings. The church is located at 1820 15th Street in downtown Boulder.