Seventy-five years is a long time for a nonprofit organization not only to survive but to grow and flourish. St. Anthony's has done so because it has grappled with these questions. It has remained true to the vision of its founder, been responsive to the signs of the times and held on to hope when those it serves face increasing difficulties. If a history of an organization like St. Anthony's is written and read to discover the meaning of all the effort, and all the struggles, and all the hopes, then perhaps from the start a look to the sign above the door offers a clue.

"What's it mean, lady?"
"For the love of God."

CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNINGS

It all began on the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin a few years after the end of World War II. In this often-maligned neighborhood, generations of survivors had arrived, struggled, settled for a while and moved on. In the late 1940s, the Tenderloin's unique offering of single room occupancy hotels, built after the 1906 earthquake and fire, attracted single men who had minimal jobs or no work at all.

Although much has been made of the post-World War II economic boom that hit San Francisco and all of California, like most economic expansions, this one left the most vulnerable behind. Postwar San Francisco was shifting from an economy based on manufacturing, distribution and maritime industries to one based on finance, insurance and tourism. White-collar jobs replaced blue collar jobs; the city's low-rise factories were beginning to give way to high-rise office buildings. Aging laborers and craftsmen unable or unwilling to follow their jobs to the Bay Area's suburbs were left stranded. Many had been laid off from the shipyards closed after World War II, or they had aged out of migratory work in logging, mining and agriculture. Many had succumbed to alcohol addiction or were veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD, then called "shell shock").

These were the hungry who came to the Franciscan parish of Saint Boniface on Golden Gate Avenue for help. For centuries, Franciscan churches

throughout the world have been known as places where the poor could come for aid. Since San Francisco's 1906 earthquake, a daily breadline had formed along Golden Gate Avenue outside Saint Boniface. The friars made sandwiches and handed them out. During the Great Depression, more than 700 hungry people lined up each day to receive help. In 1941, the parish made a modification to address complaints from parishioners and neighbors about the presence of this line: Instead of sandwiches, the hungry received a voucher for a simple 35-cent meal at a nearby cafe.

It was against this backdrop that a Franciscan friar, Father Alfred Boeddeker, OFM entered this story. In 1948, the Franciscan leadership of the Province of Saint Barbara asked Father Alfred to leave his teaching position as professor of theology and canon law at the seminary in Santa Barbara and move to Saint Boniface parish in San Francisco. This was a homecoming of sorts, for Father Alfred had been born in San Francisco at 13th and Folsom Streets on August 7, 1903 and had been baptized at Saint Boniface Church. After years of teaching, he had shared with his religious superiors his dream of being a missionary. They had decided to send him to China to start a Catholic university there. He had come to the Bay Area to begin preparing himself by studying Mandarin, as well as Chinese history and politics at the University of California, Berkeley.

In a classic case of "life is what happens while making plans" and the communist takeover of China in October, 1949, a disappointed Father Alfred was forced to discontinue his studies. His Franciscan brothers whom he had hoped to join in China were now under house arrest, dashing any hopes for his missionary career. He was then named pastor of Saint Boniface Church, where the very active German immigrant congregation welcomed his energy and entrepreneurial spirit.

Like any smart pastor and obedient friar, Father Alfred continued programs already in place when he arrived. He took his turn answering the door and

handing out the restaurant vouchers to the hungry men who came calling. But his Franciscan sensibility left him unsatisfied by this practical approach. "This type of help seemed like a push-off to me;" he observed, "the human personality was not recognized with enough dignity and friendliness." There had to be a different way to meet these needs.

A fellow Franciscan from 800 years before seemed to share his conviction. A statue of Saint Anthony of Padua stood in Saint Boniface Church. Father Alfred often told the story of the night in 1949 when he knelt before that statue—depicting the friar/saint giving bread to a poor man. Father Alfred recalled being struck by a distracting voice in his head. It seemed to be Saint Anthony saying to him "Why don't you do that?" Father Alfred's immediate response was to answer the saint by saying "Okay, you do it, and I'll help." And thus was born St. Anthony's Dining Room.

In an interview close to the end of his life, Father Alfred was still not clear whether the voice he heard while kneeling before the statue was in his head or was the voice of the saint himself. What is clear was his commitment to helping the saint make it happen, and he got right on it. It was fortuitous that the Franciscans had purchased the building next to the church in 1932. For 15 years they rented spaces to retail stores, restaurants and other enterprises. By 1949 most of those occupants had moved out and plans were afoot to use the space for parish and provincial offices, and a parish lending library. In the basement of that building was a large room that at one time had been an auto repair shop. What attracted Father Alfred's attention was a long indoor ramp that had allowed cars to enter the shop.

Now what Father Alfred saw surely was a vision: He saw this room refashioned into the ideal space for a cafeteria-like dining room where the hungry could sit around tables. They would be fed nutritious meals and regain some sense of belonging to a community. The ramp down from Jones Street would make the issue of a line on Golden Gate Avenue a moot point. The guests (not