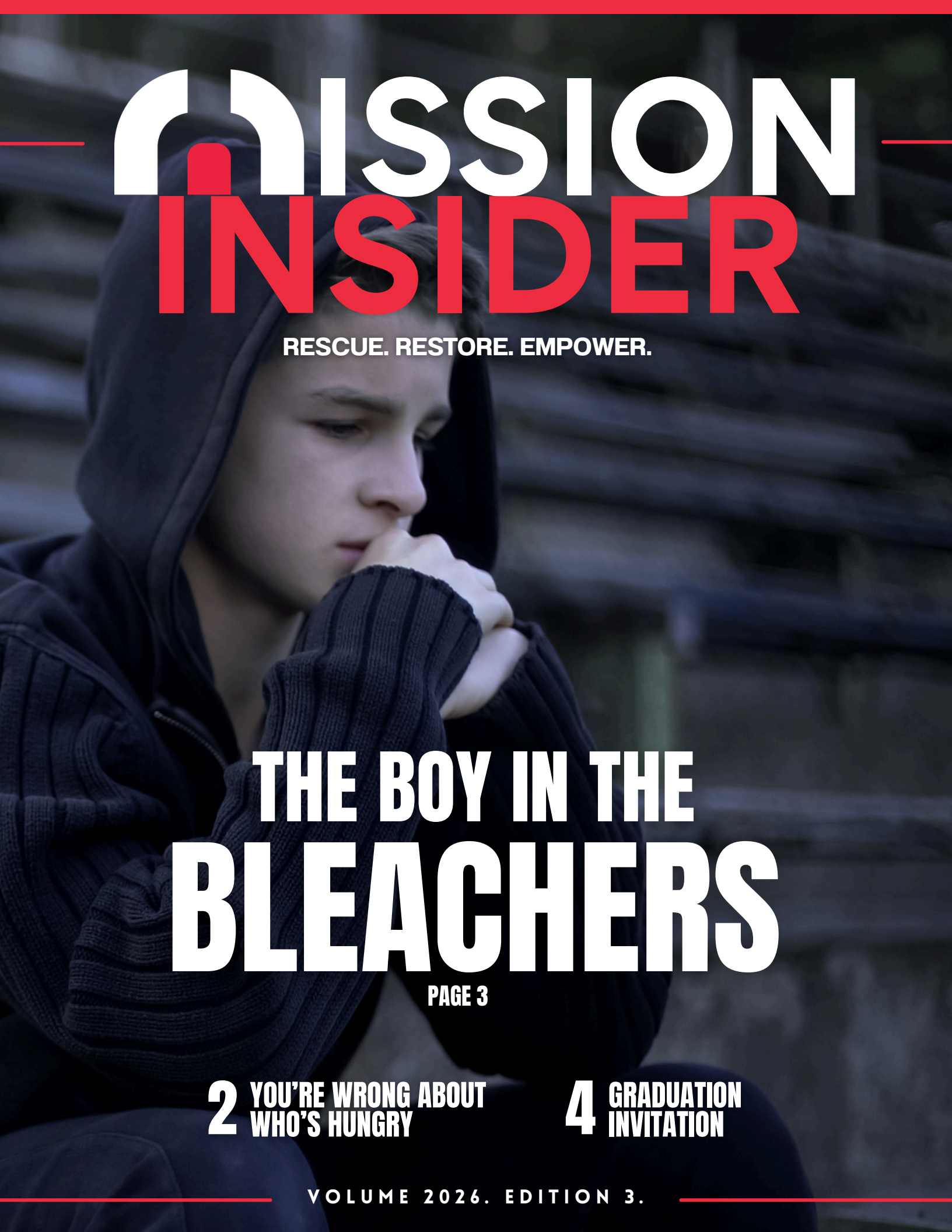




MISSION INSIDER

RESCUE. RESTORE. EMPOWER.

THE BOY IN THE BLEACHERS

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INVITATION

VOLUME 2026. EDITION 3.

You're Wrong About Who's Hungry

58% of the people Fresno Mission serves are under 18 years old.

There is a version of homelessness most of us picture without even trying. A man on a park bench. A woman pushing a shopping cart down the street. Fresno Mission has spent decades meeting people in that exact picture. What has changed, faster than expected, is who we expect them to be.

Since the start of 2026, **Fresno Mission has served 899,548 meals across our campuses.** That number is staggering, but the one underneath it has reshaped our mission entirely. Fifty-eight percent of the people we serve are children under eighteen, kids who should be worrying about homework, not their next meal or where they will sleep tonight.

That shift is why Fresno Mission built an arm of our ministry for young people, called **The Landing**, our drop-in resource spot at City Center for transitional-aged youth with nowhere else safe to go. It offers food, laundry, clothing and employment help. Since the start of 2026, The Landing has served 173 transitional-aged youth and we project a 52 percent year-over-year increase.

"They come in angry and confused, and we cannot reject them," said Francisco Pelayo, Fresno Mission's Director of Youth Services.

"Our number one calling is to recreate the kind of loving relationship so many of these youth have never had."

That growth reflects a need deepening across our region. Youth aging out of foster care. Youth fleeing unsafe homes. Youth who have simply run out of anywhere else to turn.

Food is part of our welcome. Through **First Fruits Market** and partners like **City Without Orphans**, meals reach these youth far beyond a single scheduled meal a day. For many, food insecurity is the water they have been swimming in for years. Knowing there is always something to eat, with no cost and no catch, undoes the belief that nothing is ever simply theirs to have.

All of this is more than logistics to us. It is an open door, the kind Christ speaks of standing at, waiting to share a meal.

That first connection over a meal becomes the doorway to everything else we hope to offer.

Safety. Stability. Real healing.

Meeting a young person's hunger is rarely the end of the story. It is usually just the beginning.



conversations on a
BENCH

**24 HOURS. ONE BENCH.
COUNTLESS CONVERSATIONS.**

Our CEO will spend 24 consecutive hours on a bench in the community, creating space for conversation about homelessness and experiencing the vulnerability of having nowhere else to go.

Anyone passing by can take a seat. They can ask questions. Share a story. Listen. Talk about homelessness. Or simply spend a few minutes together.



LIVE EVENT
AND 24-HOUR
LIVESTREAM

**October 8-9
Starting at 12 P.M.**



The Boy in the Bleachers:

How Jamie Found Solid Ground

At night Jamie climbed as high as he could.

He was seventeen when we met him. Home was wherever felt safest, usually the top rows of a stadium's bleachers to hide, the way a soldier claims the high ground. Up there he could see anyone coming. He had time to run, to hide, to decide. The height did not make him comfortable. It made him feel something he had not felt in a long time. It made him feel **in control**.

To understand why a teenager would choose a stadium bench over shelter or a family's couch, it helps to understand what he had already survived. Jamie's mother died when he was fourteen. No one taught him how to move healthy grief through a young body and mind. What followed instead was foster care, five different homes in just a few years, each one a new set of rules and a new reason to keep his guard up.

"Think of a five-year-old who has just existed through time," said Francisco Pelayo, describing what he has seen in kids like Jamie. **"They find themselves older, still a kid but legally a young adult, and they have had to tap into that sink-or-swim place just to sleep and try again the next day."**

That sink-or-swim instinct is why Jamie climbed. Every decision came down to one question. How do I get to higher ground before something gets to me first?

Jamie's story is not unusual among the youth Fresno Mission serves. Nationally, **one in five who age out of foster care experience homelessness within four years, and by twenty-six, more than a third have been homeless at least once.** Jamie was right on pattern.

By the time Jamie found his way to The Landing, he was not arriving because he had mapped out where his life was headed. Almost no one does. Most youth arrive as a last resort, when everything outside had gotten bad enough. The internal monologue Francisco hears most often sounds something like this:

"I don't know where to go or who to trust. Are you safe?"

That is not a question answered with a form or a checklist. It is answered by showing up, again and again, until someone starts to believe you mean it.

The exhaustion of staying constantly on guard starts to lift once a young person believes it themselves. That's when something else moves in: Hunger. Not just the physical kind, but the kind ignored so long it almost stopped registering.

"Having a crisis response model without food is a missed opportunity," Francisco said.

Places like First Fruits Market give youth like Jamie the chance to simply shop for their own groceries, no charge, no shame. Choosing food for themselves is not something anyone ever taught them, so **our staff walks alongside them and helps put together a first meal. It is a small thing, but it is often the start of real trust.**

That first shared meal is never really the end goal. Sitting across a table from someone and staying while they finish is its own kind of language, one that says you belong here.

Scripture describes it the same way. Jesus does not just offer to feed the hungry. He asks to sit and eat with them. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20). The invitation was never just a meal. It was time spent together, and for Jamie, that first plate of food was the moment the door actually opened.

Feeding a hungry teenager is in some ways the easy part. What comes after is harder: untangling the wiring a childhood like Jamie's leaves behind. Years of instability teach a young brain that safety is temporary and trust is a liability. Undoing that takes people willing to sit with someone through the mental load and keep showing up anyway.

That part is slow. Some youth struggle to stay because we are asking something never asked of them before. To be vulnerable. To trust people they just met. Our staff and case managers celebrate every small victory, because we are in this for the long haul.

Jamie is still writing his story. We do not get to know how every chapter ends, but he is safe tonight and someone is still walking alongside him. He is not the only one and that need keeps growing.

Every meal, every bed, every case manager who shows up for someone like Jamie exists because people like you choose to make it possible.

Will you give today?

Mission facts

58%

of the people Fresno Mission serves are under 18

1 in 5

who age out of foster care becomes homeless within four years

60%

of child sex-trafficking survivors have a history in the welfare system

0%

of operational funding is received from the government

Our work is made possible by donors like you.



DONATE TODAY. Scan the QR code or use the remit and envelope.



A MESSAGE FROM MATT

Most youth flee the systems meant to help them. At Fresno Mission we are building one they will run toward instead.

Right now, food insecurity is deepening across the Central Valley faster than most people realize. Federal SNAP cuts have already pushed families off benefits they relied on, **more than 246,000 people in Fresno County alone depend on CalFresh and local schools report that roughly 40 percent of their students need food assistance.** The summer heat has pushed even more people through our doors, and Thanksgiving is only a few months away, a season that always brings a surge of families needing a warm meal and a safe place to be.

This spring, I wrote about a financial gap our organization was facing, caused by lost non-donation revenue that threatened our ability to keep serving through the summer. We asked for \$523,000 to close that gap, many of our donors responded to keep our doors open and raised more than \$300,000. Bringing us to about \$100,000 from meeting our goal. To my surprise, **the need has grown even faster than the giving.**

Here is what I want you to know. Feeding this community is not the work of one building or one program. It happens across our whole organization, through the departments and locations we run every day and through the nonprofit partners who stand beside us.

Where We're Feeding Our Community

- Within our **City Center, CC's Kitchen** serves dinner every day to anyone who walks through the door, no questions asked.
- **Family Center, City Studios, City Youth and The Landing** provide three meals a day to families who have nowhere else to go and youth who find themselves alone entering adulthood.
- **Searcy Center**, our residential recovery campus, serves three meals a day, every day, to individuals and families with children who live and heal there.
- **Partner Agencies, Churches and Ministries** receive shared food donations from us so they can extend that same help to their own neighbors across the Valley.

None of this happens without YOU.

The future of the Central Valley won't be decided in Sacramento or Washington. It will be decided right here, by neighbors who show up for each other. To learn more or get involved, visit fresnomission.org. The need is growing, but so is the opportunity to respond.

MATT DILDINE
CEO OF THE FRESNO MISSION

MISSION INSIDER

You're Invited!

Celebrating Transformation

Join us as we celebrate our Searcy Center graduates and the hard work, perseverance and transformation behind this important milestone.

Each graduate has overcome challenges, reached meaningful goals and taken important steps toward a new chapter. **And you are part of their story.** Your generosity helps provide the programs, resources and support that make these journeys of restoration possible.

OCTOBER 2, 2026

6:00 - 8:00 PM
CrossCity Christian Church

Come celebrate their accomplishments with us

For more information, visit:
fresnomission.org/graduation.

Your favorite coffee just got easier to enjoy.

EZ/47 Coffee Shop is now open on weekends, and when you can't stop by, we'll come to you. EZ/47 is on Doordash!

Order your favorite coffee and treats for delivery, and know that your purchase is helping make Fresno Mission's work possible.

DRINK COFFEE. MAKE AN IMPACT.



Join us in prayer for...

- Children and youth facing homelessness, hunger and instability.
- Young adults aging out of foster care and searching for a safe place to turn.
- Families struggling with food insecurity and the rising cost of living.
- Our Searcy Center graduates as they begin a new chapter.
- Our staff, volunteers and partners walking alongside those we serve.
- God's continued provision as the need across our community grows.

Did you know?

When you shop at Mission Thrift, your purchase helps fund Fresno Mission programs that serve men, women, children and families in our community.

SHOP. SAVE.
Support the Mission!

SHOP IN STORE OR ONLINE AT SHOPMISSIONTHRIFT.COM

