

Richard Sapp and Barbara Sapp's *Food is Love* ministry in Jacksonville Florida

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Rev. Richard Sapp and Mrs. Barbara Sapp

"Today, I got four cases of strawberries," says Rev. Richard Sapp, beaming.

"Sometimes I'll get high-end stuff like lobster tail, scallops, and imported cheese," he says. "I've even had a five-pound bag of jumbo shrimp."

At 79 years old, with his hatchback fully loaded, Rev. Sapp joyfully hits the roads of different neighborhoods in sunny Jacksonville, Florida. He has boxes of fresh food to deliver - something he's done every day for the past 21 years of his "Food is Love" ministry.

"I came back to my hometown in 1990 and started working as a food solicitor at the Second Harvest food bank for a couple of years," he says. "The food bank was for eight counties and had more than 450 churches signed up."

That experience helped Rev. Sapp eventually cultivate relationships and his own food network in Jacksonville, including 12 grocers and farms and warehouses.

"It was incremental," he says. "We'd get like 20 cases of yogurt and then eventually we became more systematic. Now the food is everything you can think of."

Food is Love

Blessed in marriage for 46 years this December, Rev. Sapp has the loving support of his wife, Barbara.

"My wife said to me, 'food is love,' and behind the scenes she is the operative of this ministry with her humble support and prayer."

The couple, who have five adult children, say the food ministry is an "open-ended effort" to give to their community, inspired by Rev. Sapp's years of church work in the fishing industry.

Fishers of Men

"I'd been in the military, had a Master's Degree and joined the Unification movement at age 30," he says. "Rev. Moon called me to start the tuna business and I spent 10 years in the seafood industry." The late Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon are the co-founders of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), also known as the Unification movement.

"It was a rough course," he continues, "but the fish business helped me grow."

Rev. Sapp credits that precious time as a "blueprint" for his food ministry.

Special Deliveries

On the residential roads, Rev. Sapp slows to a roll as he passes each home and waves. "I drive slowly and ask God to guide me," he says. "People will come out to their mailboxes. I give them a mixed and balanced box of quality food to help the low-income families on a regular basis."

Jacksonville - the most populous city in the South outside of the state of Texas - has a poverty rate of 15 percent. What's more, one in eight people struggle with hunger in the U.S., [reports](#) Feeding America.

"About 80 percent of the people who get a box of food from me say 'thank you' and 'God bless you,'" says Rev. Sapp, who is pastor of Jacksonville Family Church. "Though they're not coming out to my church, there is that connection where God can work."

And Rev. Sapp's giving doesn't stop there.

"Invariably, I have food in the back of my vehicle," he says, chuckling. "So if I ever see someone who is hungry, I pull over and announce that I'm running a food ministry. I let them take whatever they want. I go everywhere; I just want to take care of God's children."

Reducing Food Waste

If there's any food to spare, Rev. Sapp takes it to local nonprofits to reduce food waste. In America, food waste is estimated between 30 percent to 40 percent of the food supply, [reports](#) the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"One third of the food that we produce in this country is thrown away and goes to waste," says Rev. Sapp.

"That's part of what really drives me. Many parts of the world are starving... I told God I will try to rescue this food."

When market prices drop for produce, like cabbage, Rev. Sapp happily picks up the food from farmers who won't harvest the unprofitable crops.

Gift of Giving

"I give away 95 percent of the food and we keep 5 percent," says Rev. Sapp. "In 20 years, my wife hasn't pushed a cart in a grocery store," he says, laughing.

"We've built these wonderful relationships and had many great experiences through this ministry," he continues. "I've had fun with it and made friendships with that attitude. I don't want anything back or recognition. It's just the gift of giving; that's what it's about."