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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Feed My Sheep to offer free COVID-19 testing May 1

South Mississippi's largest soup kitchen remains open:

"We just had to figure out how to do it differently."

(Gulfport) Feed My Sheep, in a partnership with Coastal Family Health, will host COVID-19 testing for Gulfport's homeless population at Feed My Sheep's facility at 2615 19th Street on May 1 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The tests are free of charge and are meant to help slow the spread of COVID-19 among the most vulnerable populations on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"Feed My Sheep's number one mission is to care for our homeless and hungry neighbors in Gulfport," said David Lion, Feed My Sheep's board chairman. "Primarily, we do that through serving hot meals five days a week to anyone who comes: No questions asked. However, during this pandemic, when we are able to partner with other service providers so there is a one-stop resource for food and COVID-19 testing, of course we are going to do it."

Feed My Sheep has remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as many as 600 meals a day through its 19th Street facility and six volunteer-run delivery routes for the homebound, while employing Center for Disease Control recommendations for safety.

"We simply were not going to stop serving during this time. We just had to figure out how to do it differently," said Lion. "We closed our dining room and began to-go service out our main doors, and we have reduced the number of people in our facility at any given time. We have extended our service hours to keep lines down, and, through a donor, we set up a portable handwashing station outside. Truly, the work of our skeletal staff, board members and a few long-time volunteers has been a labor of love."

Feed My Sheep, which was formed by local churches in 1983, has served more than 1.3 million meals since 2005. In addition to serving through its facility and delivery routes for the homebound, each month Feed My Sheep donates nearly five tons of food it receives to other local food pantries and soup kitchens.

"If it is given to Feed My Sheep, it gets used," said Lion. "In any given month, we will receive almost 12,000 pounds of donated food. We serve all we can in-house, and what we can't use, including portions of food that will expire or goods that don't quite make enough for a full pan, we give to partner agencies across the coast. We depend on the good-will of our community to exist, and we believe in paying that forward."

During COVID-19 Feed My Sheep encourages anyone who is struggling with hunger or food insecurity to visit for a meal.

"We know a lot of places that provide hot, balanced meals have had to limit or suspend operations right now, which, when combined with the virus's negative economic impact, has increased stress on our community," said Lion. "As long as we are able, we will be open and ready to serve. We will not judge anyone who comes, and we know outward appearances ordinarily mean little, and right now mean even less. At Feed My Sheep we will provide the best we have to offer, and a warm sense of solidarity with whoever comes to our door."

For more information about Feed My Sheep, including how to make donations of goods or funds, visit feedmysheepgulfport.org or call (228) 864-2701.

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