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## **Mama Kim**

*By Shirley S. Shin*

LOS ANGELES—In the outskirts of Los Angeles' Koreatown, one woman has made it her life mission to help people in need. Every day 65-year-old Gloria Kim gives her heart and soul to feeding and clothing the homeless. Shirley Shin has the story.

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Kim has been operating a one-woman mobile soup kitchen for the past 20 years, waking up at 2 a.m. daily to make vegetable soup for the homeless of Los Angeles. "The early morning hours are the most difficult for the homeless because of the cold," said Kim in her native Korean language. "So I started making hot soup for them and they loved it!"

She calls them her "brothers and sisters" and they call her "Mama." Kim says the name "Mama" brings with it a great sense of responsibility. "It's not just a matter of bringing them food everyday, but it's trying to fill the multiple roles of being a mother."

Kim attributes much of who she is today to her own mother, who used to help the poor in their homeland of South Korea and bring homeless people to stay at their house.

Kim immigrated to the United States in the 1970s and worked as a nurse for several years. One day, she said she heard God's voice telling her to follow him. So Kim quit her job and decided to devote the rest of her life to serving the poor and sick. She founded the Zion Gospel Mission Church and never looked back.

Kim's years of service have earned her a fan base. "I'm crazy about her!" said Robert Tony, who has known Kim for years. "This little lady don't pull no punches. She's down here in the trenches like Mother Theresa."

Tony said it's Kim's constant encouraging that keeps him out of trouble. "Sometimes I'll deviate and she'll see me and call me 'Brother Tony come here. Pray with me.'"

Vince Malone also credits Kim for helping him change his ways. "She'll always have inside the bag, bagels and bananas, fruits and whatever. And she'll have also have a scripture. So every time I read the scriptures, it'd get me a little stronger," said Malone. "I'm coming over here less and less. She sees me one day and says 'where you been?' I say 'well, I've been going home again.'"

After two hours of preparing the food, Kim heads out to the streets. Her system is simple. She drives around and stops wherever she sees a homeless person, whether on street corners, in parking lots or under bridges.

It won't be until 11 p.m. when she finally gets to sleep, a schedule that doesn't leave much time for her to look after herself and her own ailments, which include cataracts.

Kim often wonders how long she'll be able to keep up with the schedule. But she doesn't let the thought occupy her mind for too long as she believes that her future lies in God's hands.

“As long as God continues to call me to do this work, and as long as I'm physically able, I won't ever stop,” said Kim.

\*Interview with Gloria Kim has been translated from Korean to English