



BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT *because we are Catholic.*



“THE “HOME” REPRESENTS THE MOST PRECIOUS HUMAN TREASURES, THAT OF ENCOUNTER, THAT OF RELATIONS AMONG PEOPLE, DIFFERENT IN AGE, CULTURE AND HISTORY, BUT WHO LIVE TOGETHER AND TOGETHER HELP ONE ANOTHER TO GROW. FOR THIS REASON, THE “HOME” IS A CRUCIAL PLACE IN LIFE, WHERE LIFE GROWS AND CAN BE FULFILLED, BECAUSE IT IS A PLACE IN WHICH EVERY PERSON LEARNS TO RECEIVE LOVE AND TO GIVE LOVE.”

– Pope Francis

Year of Mercy: Parishes Find Innovative Ways to Help Homeless

During this Extraordinary Jubilee Year, Pope Francis has called on the Church to live out the Corporal Works of Mercy. Catholic churches in California, and around the world, have taken his call to heart in new, innovative ways as they have looked to serve the homeless in various parishes throughout the state.

“We are being called,” as Deacon Ruben Solorio, director of social ministries of the Archdiocese of San Jose describes, “to inspire more churches to open doors.”

Santa Teresa parish in San Jose heeded the request of Bishop Patrick McGrath to open churches and identified the pressing need for a “safe park” – a place where families could park their cars and obtain access to kitchen and bathroom facilities. Originally slated for just one month, the Safe Park program ran from February 17 to April. More than 30 volunteers served 36 people, including two families with children under the age of 10.

“We had no idea that this was an issue,” described Santa Teresa Parish Pastoral Associate Lynda DeManti. In many cases, the car is the very last possession these families have left, with many living in their cars for over four years. The safe park enabled families to catch up on much needed sleep in order to concentrate on other issues such as health and job hunting. The parish of 1,100 has 300 volunteers and also runs a food pantry

and outreach for nearby Watsonville farm workers. Guests at the safe park helped fill baskets and organize an Easter egg hunt for the Watsonville families.

For the Church, opening its doors was a “fairly easy process,” remarked DeManti. Once the decision was made, “everyone jumped in and was able to make it all happen in less than two weeks.”

The only disappointment is there was no facility for participants to go to at the program’s end. Some parishioners have been able to help individuals on a one-on-one basis with room rentals, medical needs and job hunting. The next step is ardent, ongoing advocacy

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Cots for the homeless




Showers for the homeless

for safe parks. While the city of San Jose waived any permit fees for this past winter's program, Santa Clara County is looking to charge fees as high as \$2,500 to permit safe parks in the future.

This past winter, talk of the approach of El Niño created much concern the City of San Jose's 4,700 homeless, and for the 7,000 homeless in Santa Clara County. Many obstacles, including the permits mentioned above, prevented some churches from participating in shelter programs. However, in partnership with three other churches, Holy Spirit Parish in San Jose surmounted these challenges and housed 15 homeless women in their sanctuary from January through April with a rotating shelter program.

“This was an amazing, transformative experience for the Church,” reflected Michael Ferrero, director of social ministries for Holy Spirit. “People who I had never seen in Church before stepped up to volunteer.” Ferrero described a medical team that volunteered its time, and each member has already asked to participate again next year.

Like the volunteers at Santa Teresa, the difficulty came in saying goodbye at the close of the program. After getting to know the women who participated, there was grave concern for their ongoing well-being.

Holy Spirit has already put plans in place for next year's program, with 12 different churches signing up to participate in the rotating shelter program (the original three from this year will all be involved again). At least six of these churches will have extended hours to include daytime “warming centers.”

“It is pretty ambitious but we are excited about it,” added Ferrero. “Opening our doors to the sanctuary -- nothing epitomizes Pope Francis' request more.”

(Information and a video on the work of Holy Spirit can be found at <https://vimeo.com/167701531>.)

St. Julie's Parish in San Jose partnered with Casa de Clara and The Catholic Worker to house homeless women in their parish hall during Lent. Neighbors in addition to the parishioners came forward to assist with all aspect of the effort. The most profound change was not for the clients but for the parishioners.

The effort “brought everyone together and educated people as to what homelessness is – the life of the working poor,” described Sharon Aeria, director of community, stewardship and development. “Suddenly it was not as scary to approach or help.”

The works of mercy have presented even larger gifts to those parishioners who answered the call to serve.

“We have been able to hear their stories and understand profoundly that there are no small works when the church is involved,” reflected Deacon Solorio. “The work done by our Churches this year has enabled us to see the homeless through God's eyes. It is our opportunity to share God's mercy and instill in others the ability to see the homeless with mercy and compassion.”

For more information, go to:

catholic.org