



**Works of Mercy ministry cares for the homeless, accompanies fellow disciples**



■ Good Shepherd Parish created Works of Mercy ministry to help the homeless and poor in Elk Grove.

**IN ELK GROVE, Good Shepherd Parish’s Works of Mercy (WOM) ministry reaches up, down and out — up to God, down to earth and out to each other — living the call of disciples to be stewards. Undaunted by the weighty and growing need among area homeless, WOM taps every resource and casts a wide net to fellow parish ministries and parishioners in service to “these least brothers of mine,” says Betty May, WOM ministry lead.**

“When you’re giving, it feeds the soul,” she says, reinforcing how stewardship is a disciple’s response. She shares WOM’s organic model of caring for the homeless by cultivating God’s gifts and sharing them.

WOM was formalized in November 2020 as a Good Shepherd ministry upon receiving a permit from Sacramento County to function essentially as a food bank. It is subject to annual fees and inspections, which ensure attention to best practices in collecting and distributing food.

Every Monday morning begins with prayer as ministry participants

**OUR STORY**



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gather in the parish center’s kitchen. Betty describes the “blessing of food,” and their prayers “to find those in need.” She recalls the miracles occurring as volunteers assemble pulled pork sandwiches, turkey pot pie, or a holiday turkey dinner — always with two beverages.

“It’s exactly enough,” she explains.

WOM pursues donated food products but also receives excess volume of beverages, lunch bag items, breads and pastries from St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP), which itself benefits from the generosity of local grocers and

restaurants. Once WOM’s needs for roughly 100 weekly meals and lunch bags are met, they pass on any surplus to Loaves and Fishes, Christy Cares Outreach, Volunteers of America and the Salvation Army.

“This wouldn’t exist without the grace of God,” Betty insists, stressing, “He puts things in our path,” allowing the gifts of God to be enhanced and flourish in profound gestures of respect for the lives of those less fortunate.

Betty reports leftovers are never wasted, and God’s hand provides extraordinary blessings — like the time a box of donated clothing in her back seat happened to include the perfect mix of children’s sizes for a family encountered in their ministry. Or the time when donated oranges came in the exact quantity needed to fill all the lunch bags. Or how a parishioner who is a professional chef offsets the cooking restrictions of WOM’s permit by donating cooked foods from his restaurant.

After the meals are prepared and loaded into transport containers, teams set out to make their deliveries to homeless encampments in and around Elk Grove. WOM's county permit also allows them to serve any county location, including along Sacramento's rivers.

Father Diogo Baptista assists, easily translating his work and compassion as a former chaplain at Mule Creek State Prison to the work of feeding the hungry and thirsty. Now retired, Father Diogo joins regularly on Mondays. Likewise, Deacon Rommel Declines, Sr. has long journeyed to random creeks, parking lots and culverts, delivering hope with a bit of food. Also helping are Mike and Laura, and Tim and Cathy, and Steve and Lanie, and Bob and Gabe, and ... you get the idea.

WOM collaborates with St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School, accepting help and contributions for up to two dozen of the 100 collective meals prepared every Monday. They also provide "blessing bags" packed with seasonally appropriate donations, from socks to sunscreen.

Parish and school students preparing for confirmation along with their parents participate in baking and packaging cookies for blessing bags. They take time to learn about the plight of the homeless before delivering the blessing bags to encampments as an act of love and stewardship.

Earlier this year, WOM helped Elk Grove's Homeless Assistance Resource Team (HART) facilitate the move of three homeless families from transitional housing to permanent apartment homes. Parishioners donated new or gently used items to give these families a fresh start and a comfortable place to call home. SVdP provided additional food and supplies while Knights of Columbus Laguna Creek Council 11236 coordinated with WOM to handle the physical work of move-in day for the three households.



■ Brittany was able to move her family into permanent housing this year.



■ Betty May, lead for Works of Mercy, with Brittany and her three children in their new apartment.

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Brittany and her three children appreciate the gift of beds, pillows and new bedding and the cozy comforts in their central living space and kitchen. Just doors away, Darlene's smile conveys deep gratitude and a genuine "good-to-be-home" outlook as she adapts to her new living space and the chance to welcome her grandchildren for periodic visits.

WOM's work embraces the essence of stewardship — walking with disciples as stewards of many gifts, returning them with increase to the Lord. †



■ Betty May and Darlene in Darlene's new home.