

Appleton parish opens homeless shelter

Need for shelter arises after Salvation Army closes its facility

By Jeff Kurowski
Compass Assistant Editor

APPLETON — A new door is open for homeless men and women in the Fox Cities.

The Fox Valley Warming Shelter began service on Feb. 8. St. Joseph Parish is housing the shelter through the end of April. A permanent location is being sought.

The formation of the shelter organization began in March of 2007, after the Salvation Army in Appleton ceased its shelter services.

"We wanted to rent the space (at the Salvation Army)," said Don Stoebauer, a member of the shelter leadership team. "We would have run the program."

The request was denied, so the group searched for a new location. St. Joseph Parish stepped forward.

"(Capuchin) Fr. Larry Ablar (pastor) had a very sensitive attitude about helping these people in need," said Therese Janssen, volunteer coordinator for the shelter. "We worked with his parish council."

The organization, Fox Valley Warming Shelter, Inc., registered as a 501(C)(3) non-profit and secured liability insurance. The leadership team consulted with Fr. Guy Blair, pastor at St. John the Evangelist Parish, which houses the homeless shelter in Green Bay.

The shelter operates in the St. Joseph Parish gathering room. The facility cannot open until 9 p.m. each evening due to parish activities. It will not be available on Holy Thursday or Holy Saturday. The leadership team is seeking other arrangements for those two nights, said Stoebauer, a member of St. Paul Parish, Combined Locks.

"It is truly a warming shelter," he added. "We do not have showers. We do not have a washer or dryer. Some volunteers take extra clothes, from the clients who have extra clothes, home to wash them. We've been serving seven or eight people each night. These are people who do not qualify for assistance at other facilities."

A warm meal is served each evening, and continental breakfast items are available in the mornings. The shelter operates until 8 a.m.

The warming shelter opened with a minimum budget, so St. Joseph parishioners donated food for meals.

"Fr. Larry stimulated a wonderful response from the parish," said Janssen. "Volunteers made soup to serve. The parish also collected financial donations."

Two paid staff members alternate nights at the shelter. Volunteers assist with overnight shifts. The operation has received the approval of Appleton Mayor Tim Hanna and the Appleton Police Department, which is located across the street from St. Joseph Church. The Fox Cities Housing Coalition has raised opposition, fearing that the facility will cut into funding for other shelters. Attorney Tom Janssen is serving as the legal representative for the Fox Valley Warming Shelter.

"Finding a new building is our main goal," said Stoebauer. "Once we find a new location, we will begin 24-hour service."

"The shelter is a viable effort and there is a population out there that needs help," said Therese Janssen. "It's an effort in progress."

To make a financial donation in support of the shelter, make checks payable to Fox Valley Warming Shelter, P.O. Box 1261, Appleton, WI 54912-1261. For more information, contact Don Stoebauer at (920) 788-6362 or e-mail: dstoebauer@new.rr.com.

St. John shelter to continue next fall, says Deacon Reilly

Homeless shelter is essential part of church's ministry

By Jeff Kurowski
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GREEN BAY — Citing the call of Catholics to give food and shelter to those in need, Deacon Tim Reilly, diocesan director of administration, announced Monday, March 3, that St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter will open again on Nov. 1, 2008.

The shelter, which began operations on Nov. 6, 2007, and is scheduled to close on April 15, has served approximately 231 homeless men and women. The common council of the city of Green Bay voted to grant a zoning variance to the shelter for the winter of 2007/2008.

"We had anticipated an average population of maybe 25," said Deacon Reilly, "and we ended up with an average population of 38, going up over 50 on some nights."

"The shelter has operated as you would expect it to; very well," he continued. "It has a competent staff, competent volunteers. Time to time, issues arise. Part of the protocol of having a shelter is dealing with those issues. All of those issues have been handled in a professional manner."

The timing of the announcement allows for implementation of changes between now and next fall.

Deacon Reilly explained that the shelter will open earlier than 6 p.m. each evening. Clients are arriving prior to 6 p.m., and an earlier start time will address concerns from neighbors.

The facility will also stay open longer on weekday mornings to allow more time for

social workers to meet with guests.

Another desired change is a daytime shelter for the homeless. St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter is seeking a partnership with another church or social service agency that can provide a day center.

Other changes include working with other faith communities or social service agencies outside Green Bay to provide shelter for St. John's clients. A person would check in at St. John's, but then be transported to another facility. Deacon Reilly also explained the benefits of having a social worker serve as executive director of the shelter on a 12-month basis, allowing the director to maintain contact with the homeless during the months shelter accommodations are not provided. Mary Marks, social services and community outreach director for St. Vincent de Paul, is currently serving as executive director at the shelter.

The announcement to reopen only pertains to the winter of 2008/2009, said Deacon Reilly.

"This past year, we had four days to prepare ourselves to run the shelter," he said. "We do not want to be in that same position next year. No other agency has plans, has staff, has funding lined up for next year. We will go forward with this plan based on our successful operation this year, but make modifications that better serve the homeless and have better relationships with the neighbors."

Deacon Reilly said he left a phone message for Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt to inform him of the plans. The shelter will operate even if the Green Bay City Council does not authorize permits, he added.

"This is a ministry of the Catholic Church," he said. "This is what we are called by Jesus to do. This is an integral and essential part of who we are as church."

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