

HOMELESSNESS IN EL CAMINO REAL

In late January, Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves and the Diocese of Real Episcopal staff visited First United Methodist Church in downtown Salinas to experience its expansive ministries for the city's homeless. They toured the church's fellowship hall, food pantry, clothing rooms, computer lab, art room, and finally reached the kitchen to don gloves and assist with serving lunch.

Upon entering the kitchen, they found another church team already hard at work: members of **St. Paul's Episcopal Church** in Salinas were preparing to plate the dinners they'd cooked for lunch. The team volunteers at First Methodist every Tuesday; on Thursdays, **Church of the Good Shepherd** in Salinas handles lunch duties. From November to April, **St. George's Episcopal Church** brings weekly dinners to the city's warming shelter at a former credit union building less than a mile away from First Methodist.

Salinas is by no means the largest example of California's growing homeless crisis, but it's typical of the struggles faced by cities across the diocese from San Luis Obispo to Santa Cruz to San Jose and Silicon Valley. While homeless numbers dropped nationwide between 2015 and 2016, California cities saw an uptick of three percent, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's annual snapshot assessment.

As cities struggle to find longer-term solutions – permanent housing, clinical outreach on the streets, case management and supportive services – Episcopal congregations have stepped up in their communities to help, either individually or in partnership with other churches. The following pages are the result of a first-ever call for information to learn about homeless ministries across El Camino Real. The response was overwhelming, both in volume and inspiration! These stories are only a sampling of what was submitted, but we hope they will provide ideas and encouragement.

Santa Clara Valley Deanery

Trinity Cathedral San Jose's homeless feeding program began in April 2001; since that time, a group of 10-15 volunteers have gathered at the Trinity kitchen on the second and third Saturdays of each month to prepare and serve a lunch to approximately 40 clients of the Julian Street Inn and Cecil B. White Center – two facilities run by InnVision/Shelter Network. Since 2010, Trinity has also provided lunch to the 20 or more families in temporary housing at the San Jose Family Shelter.

Volunteers include youngsters, teens, and adults, plus "friends of the parish" who also shop, cook and serve; the latter includes co-workers, people who find the program online, Girl Scouts, and school groups.

From February through March 2016, Trinity joined with St. Francis of Assisi and the Winter Faith Collaborative to establish and operate a temporary winter homeless shelter for men in the lower parish hall. During this period, Trinity operated shelters on a rotating weekly basis with St. Francis. Virtually the whole congregation was involved in the program, including getting permission from City Hall to run a shelter, covering the overnight shifts, preparing meals, setting up the cots and providing security.

Home rentals are so high in Mountain View that people are finding it difficult to afford rent ... so instead they live in their vehicles. But due to county and police restrictions in Mountain View, they cannot park and sleep in their vehicles for long periods in a safe environment. **St Timothy's Episcopal Church** in Mountain View and other faith-based organizations are working together to provide safe and stable parking areas for the city's homeless who live in vehicles. It's estimated that more than 100 vehicles in the area are used as homes, where these citizens -- an estimated 55% of whom are working -- live in conditions that lack water, hygiene, electricity, and most of all, dignity.

Plans are underway to implement the Pilot Safe Parking Project in Mountain View by the third quarter of 2017, using existing church lots. First steps included sending a team to Santa Barbara to observe a similar model in action, followed by locating liability insurance for parking lots. The process also includes recruiting other churches, creating rules for participants, registering and interviewing homeless clients, and publicity.

St Francis Episcopal Church of Willow Glen is operating as the first satellite food pantry for Santa Maria Urban Ministry (SMUM). St. Francis parishioners volunteer to serve every Friday from 8:30 to 11 am. Clients are provided with a food box: meat, eggs, fruits, vegetables, canned goods, dessert, fruit juice and milk. Food products are brought to St. Francis by SMUM and are provided by Second Harvest Food Bank.

St. Francis, along with several Methodist, Catholic and other churches, helped organize and initiate a four-month rotating shelter pilot project, the Winter Faith Collaborative, in January-April 2016. Their work has led to a year-round shelter called "Village House: An Interfaith Shelter of Hope," now supported by several Episcopal churches in the deanery. The rotating shelter includes overnight accommodations and daytime warming centers for 15 pre-screened, medically fragile women. St. Francis, **Good Samaritan of San Jose**, and **The Episcopal Church in Almaden** have each hosted shelters.

Village House provides vulnerable women with a caring, loving environment. For some, it's the first 24-hour "safe space" they've had in years. The goal is to help them stabilize their lives and support them to move beyond homelessness – while also offering volunteer service opportunities to parishioners and community members. At St. Francis, about 90 parishioners participated alongside dozens more volunteers from the community and other parishes, including **St. Andrew's Episcopal Church** in Saratoga and **St. Jude's Episcopal Church** in Cupertino.

When the warming shelter was hosted at The Episcopal Church in Almaden, a total of 237 volunteers helped at the ECA warming center, 39 of whom were ECA members. Movies, books, puzzles, coloring books and computers were provided for guests. In addition, volunteers provided activities such as creating flower arrangements, making bread, and coloring Lenten posters. Donated gift certi-

ificates for clothing and bus passes were given to guests, who even received mugs and glasses displaying their names.

The life-changing impact of Village House is movingly illustrated by the written comments of guests:

"Thank you for teaching me what God meant when he said 'Love one another.'"

"Thank you for your warm hearts and for giving us hope!"

Every month on the first and third Friday, ECA prepares in the church's kitchen a complete meal with dessert, then serves them at three key shelters within the city of San Jose: HomeFirst, InnVision and Julian Street Inn.

In addition to being a partner in Village House, **Good Samaritan San Jose** volunteers also make blessing bags of personal hygiene items for donation to HomeFirst, San Jose's primary homeless service provider.

All Saints' Episcopal Church in Palo Alto helped transform an impossible dream to community miracle when the Opportunity Center opened in Palo Alto in 2006. In 1997, through its affiliation with Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA), a faith-based community organizing group, the church identified the plight of local homeless individuals as a community issue. All Saints' leaders met with city council members, various faith leaders, Stanford University leaders, and homeless activists, all of whom eventually formed a permanent supportive housing and drop-in center with a full range of services for homeless men, women, and families. Today the Opportunity Center is a day center for local homeless families and individuals and provides 88 units of low-income housing.

The center is overseen by the nonprofit Community Working Group, a volunteer-driven organization based in Palo Alto. It's one of three affordable housing communities



Left: Guests at The Episcopal Church in Almaden warming shelter.

Above: ECA volunteers prepare meals for area shelters.



Left: Homeless guests are served at St. Luke's in Los Gatos.
Above: The Opportunity Center in Palo Alto.

it developed to help prevent homelessness; the others are 801 Alma Family Housing and Alma Garden. About 300 people live in these properties; one in three is a child.

Thirty years ago, **St. Luke's Episcopal Church** in Los Gatos began an outreach program for homeless and barely housed members of the Los Gatos community. The program has evolved from a weekly handout of groceries to its present status: a weekly hot meal, a bag of groceries, access to clothes, assistance with transportation, communications, veterans' counseling, and more. The volunteer staff includes both men and women from various faith communities. Each client receives a weekly bag of food, plus tents, sleeping bags, and tarps as needed.

Under the guidance of Jo Greiner, Outreach Director of the program since 1996, the St. Luke's Pantry program raises all operational funds and is supported in many ways by the parish. It thrives with the volunteer work of dozens of local volunteers, and benefits from individuals in the community, from anonymous financial helpers, and a coterie of client helpers.

Monterey Deanery

For two years **St. Philip's Episcopal Church** in Scotts Valley, has opened their church facility and offered dinner every Saturday night for about 20 participants in the Faith Community Shelter, operated by the Association of Faith Communities of Santa Cruz County, of which St. Philip's is a member. These participants share dinner, stay overnight at the church, and then have breakfast on Sunday morning. Some remain for the Sunday service and all help clean up before leaving for the day. Other churches in the area are responsible for providing food and shelter throughout the week.

St. Philip's also partners with Wings Homeless Advocacy, an all-volunteer organization committed to living out our values of compassion, dignity and respect for all people by uniting the community to be volunteer advocates for those moving out of homelessness and onto a path of healing—

working together to end chronic homelessness in Santa Cruz County. Working with professional case managers, Wings connects caring advocates with a homeless participant to help them obtain resources needed to become housed and self-sufficient.

St. John's in Aptos has been actively involved in many homeless support services. The church raised funds to help build the Rebele Family Shelter, part of the Homeless Services Center (HSC), on the corner of River and Coral Streets in Santa Cruz. (The facility was named for St. John's members Rowland and Pat Rebele.) Upon completion of the facility, the parish furnished two family apartments. The shelter accommodates 28 families with children for a maximum stay of six months, providing counseling and career exploration, and helping people find jobs and permanent housing.

Inspired by Rowland (fondly called "Reb"), St. John's members hold the Chairperson position at both the Homeless Service Center of Santa Cruz and the Association of Faith Communities (AFC). Reb has been a funder and organizer for much of the structure of the Homeless Service Center and the AFC attending to needs of those without homes in Santa Cruz. St. John's members have prepared marvelous meals, fellowship and Compline at St. John's on Tuesdays as part of the AFC's Faith Shelter.



Above: Volunteers at Church of the Good Shepherd, Salinas.



Left: Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves, diocesan staff, and volunteers from St. Paul's Salinas serve meals at First United Methodist in January. **Above:** Teens at St. Philip's Scotts Valley prepare meals.

Calvary Episcopal Church in Santa Cruz supports several homeless services. Calvary is a founding member of the Association of Faith Communities of Santa Cruz County, which operates the Faith Community Shelter, the Santa Cruz County Winter Emergency Shelter, and more. The church also hosts the Faith Community Shelter, housing up to 20 people one night every other week.

Every Monday evening, its Coffee House provides a warm meal for about 75 people. More than that, the Coffee House also offers a sustaining, helpful opportunity for those gathered to engage in music, prayer, and Bible study. Additionally, Calvary's food pantry – now in its 44th year – provides fresh produce and nonperishable food-stuffs free of charge to 40-50 clients twice a month.

Calvary is one of the designated host sites for the Santa Cruz Warming Center, an emergency service that provides shelter on the coldest and/or rainiest nights. The church has also authorized Loads of Love (LOLO) to park their mobile laundry van in the church parking lot one morning a week. A Calvary member serves on the Board of the Homeless Garden Project, an employment training program in Santa Cruz serving individuals who are currently or formerly homeless and experiencing difficulty finding employment. The project supports an organic farm and retail shop and provides training in organic farming and retail sales.

Three nights a month, **St. John's Chapel in Monterey** provides shelter to homeless women through I-Help, a joint program across Monterey area churches. The individuals stay Wednesday through Friday nights, giving them some sense of continuity. St. John's also works with One Starfish, a safe parking and support services program for homeless women in Monterey. St. John's provides overnight parking to working homeless women and their families. The church allows up to six cars to park at their lot seven nights a week from 7am to 7:30 am, providing a stable place to live while they search for permanent housing.

For many years **Church of the Good Shepherd, Salinas** has focused much of its outreach on feeding homeless persons in Salinas in concert with other organizations. Offerings are made every Sunday, placed in the Monterey County Food Bank barrel located in the sanctuary, translating to an annual total of 5,000 lbs. of donated food.

As noted on page 4, parishioners prepare and serve lunch every other Thursday to needy people who gather at First United Methodist Church in Salinas. Typically 100-150 people are served by the lunches, which are also prepared and served by **St. Paul's Episcopal Church** in Salinas every other Tuesday. Clothing, jackets, umbrellas are collected and distributed in coordination with They Are One-Local and First United Methodist. "Blessing Bags" are assembled by both Sunday School kids and congregation members – filled with items such as toothbrushes, toiletries, water bottles, lip balm, tissues, and more – and given to people living on the streets.

Good Shepherd is a member of the Interfaith Outreach of Carmel, supporting its Joining Hands Benefit Shop which raises funds for grants to Monterey organizations providing homeless services. Its work with the Salvation Army Monterey Peninsula Corps includes providing Christmas gifts for distribution to homeless children as well as backpacks filled with school supplies.

St. George's Episcopal Church in Salinas has operated a weekly Food Pantry that is open to all Salinas residents on Friday mornings from 10:30 to noon. Up to 50 families a month are given food thanks to the pantry. During the cold months of November through April, St. George's volunteers prepare and deliver a meal every month to local homeless at the Salinas Warming Shelter. In December the church also gives out gift bags filled with scarves and hats made by parishioners, plus socks, hygiene necessities, and (of course) chocolate.

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