



Coats for people who are homeless

By Chelsey Satterlee

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Michigan has decreased over the past few years. Yet Michigan's Campaign to End Homelessness, an initiative sponsored by the state government, estimates that, as of 2017, 63,024 people statewide were still living on the streets, in emergency shelters or in other places not fit for human habitation. Of those people, about 60 percent fell within the geographical region of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod.

Recognizing a need to support those experiencing homelessness, the synod took up a collection during the 2018 synod assembly to buy coats from the Empowerment Plan, a nonprofit based in Detroit, and distribute them throughout the synod.

The Empowerment Plan focuses on breaking the generational cycle of homelessness by providing single parents from local shelters with full-time jobs as seamsters. The main item they manufacture is a coat designed to meet the needs of those who are homeless. Since 2012, the Empowerment Plan has distributed more than 25,000 coats to those in need.

The coats are made from durable water-resistant Cordura® fabric from Carhartt, upcycled automotive insulation from General Motors and other materials provided by donors. The most exciting feature of the coats is their versatility. Not only can the garment be worn as a coat, but it can transform into a sleeping bag and, when not in use, fold up into an

over-the-shoulder bag for easy storage.

With generous donations from congregations and individual members, the synod raised \$2,700 and was able to purchase 27 sleeping-bag coats.

These coats were distributed to people throughout the synod to provide them with some warmth during the winter months.



Designed by the Empowerment Plan, this heavy-duty coat transforms into a sleeping bag.

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Bishop Craig and Cathy Satterlee gather coats to be given to the Homeless Angels in Lansing, Mich.

Reflections on ministry

Editor's note: *As we consider what being a pastor in the ELCA means and how we might serve congregations in different settings, we share two reflections from pastors currently serving in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod.*

Life as a battalion chaplain

By the Rev. Christopher Laughlin

Writer's note: *My opinions are my own and do not reflect those of the Second Battalion, 48th Infantry Regiment, Third Chemical Brigade; the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence; the Training and Doctrine Command; the Chaplain Corps; or the United States Army.*

I am an Army Reserve chaplain and a parish pastor serving a small, rural parish in Michigan. Currently I serve as a basic training battalion chaplain at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., one of three chaplains who lead worship at the liturgical Protestant service.

Attendance at this service fluctuates between 50 and 200. It's the youngest, most diverse congregation I can imagine, truly representative of "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Revelation 7:9). A few of the attendees are soldiers permanently assigned to Fort Leonard Wood, but most are trainees who attend our service for less than 22 weeks (many for only nine) while they complete Basic Combat Training (BCT) and/or Advanced Individual Training (AIT). They hail from every state and nearly every continent.

Some attend because, coming from a liturgical or sacramental background, they are most comfortable with this service (this was why I attended a similar service while in BCT and AIT). Others attend because they prefer hymns over praise music. Still others attend because of the relationship they have formed with their chaplain or because they are exploring different Christian worship traditions. The singing fluctuates wildly in quality, as trainees are often hoarse from "being motivated" (yelling) all week.

Then there are those trainees who attend because congregations and individuals from all over the North/West Lower Michigan Synod send me cookies for the fellowship time that follows worship each week. This has been a real gift to the trainees—those cookies are a taste of home and comfort in what is, for many of them, the most difficult and trying time in their lives. **L**

Christopher Laughlin currently serves Messiah Lutheran Church in Constantine.

A treasured privilege

By the Rev. Betsy Kamphuis

One day about five years ago, I went to Bishop Craig Satterlee's office to ask if we might baptize an unborn child. We talked about the young father who had come to me with the question because his wife, then pregnant with their second child, had been diagnosed with an unusual form of recurring brain cancer. The doctors had encouraged them to consider aborting the fetus since it was still early in the pregnancy and the cancer treatment would be aggressive. This young Christian couple struggled with the decision. If they did abort, they wanted their unborn child to be assured of God's mercy and grace through baptism. The bishop and I talked about possibilities, pastoral care and theology. Our conversation was helpful, clarifying my thinking as both a pastor and a theologian.

In the end, this young couple chose to keep the baby, pursue a course of brain surgery and radiation, and pray for the best for both mother and child. I was breathless in the face of their courage and faith. For treatment, they went to hospitals from Cleveland to the East Coast. The first surgery went well, though no one knew the state of the baby's health. At 34 weeks, they induced labor so the mother could proceed to the last stage of treatment—chemotherapy. Their baby was born healthy and breathing, not even needing extra medical support. They named her Faith. One of the highlights of my ministry was the day I got to baptize that little one.

All seemed well for a couple years. Then, in October 2017, the cancer returned and they were back in the hospital for brain surgery. This time the procedure was difficult and long, with complications ensuing. They were hopeful that they had beaten back the cancer, but last summer it returned again, and this time they were out of options.

The mother came home on hospice and the family needed help caring for her while the father continued to work. A single Facebook request from me elicited six to eight people from the church communities who immediately responded to provide 12-hour daily care—rearranging their lives, giving up their free time. Other Christians maintained the land around the couple's house or provided food. It was an amazing display of the Spirit moving through the people of God.

The mother was 29 when she took her last breath and slipped beyond our reach into God's eternal mercy and life. She left behind her husband, a 6-year-old son, a 4-year-old daughter, and the rest of her family and friends—alive, healthy, heartbroken, grieving.

Intertwined with this story are all the resonating themes of the Lutheran perspective I hold so dear: the sinful and broken nature of this world that leaves people desolate, hurting, wanting, questioning; the incredible mercy and almighty will of God, which brings life both now and in the age to come; the unanswered questions that we lay at God's throne; the living faith of God's people; the sacrifice of our Jesus Christ, who lived among us so our own stories could end in life, not death; and, finally, the goodness of God's people, who are sinners but do the work of saints.

This is my answer when people ask me why I'm so committed to parish ministry: To walk with people of God in the midst of their lives is both heartbreaking and joy-filled. It is a treasured privilege. **L**

Betsy Kamphuis is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Greenville, Mich.

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In Lansing, where the synod office is located, Bishop Craig and Cathy Satterlee delivered 16 coats to the Homeless Angels, a Christian street-based ministry that finds, befriends and supports those who are living on the streets by providing food, blankets, personal care items and tarps. The ministry also runs a community-funded hotel shelter with beds, showers, food and support to help people get back on their feet.

The Satterlees are thankful for the generosity shown by synod members and are grateful that the North/West Lower Michigan Synod could help make a difference in the lives of those currently affected by homelessness. **L**

Chelsey Satterlee is communications director for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod.



Thank you to Thrivent for sponsoring the North/West Lower Michigan Synod Rostered Leaders Christmas Worship and Luncheon!

In mid December, 40 rostered leaders from across the Synod came together at the Synod Office in Lansing for worship led by Bishop Satterlee.

After worship, they were served a homemade lunch of chicken marbella, rice, roasted carrots, macaroni & cheese, salads, and a selection of holiday desserts.

Rostered leaders were most thankful to spend time together and celebrate the Christmas season!

Thank you Thrivent!

