



Statement on Serving the Homeless in the Fort Worth Area

Service to the homeless and marginalized of Fort Worth will continue through Catholic Charities of Fort Worth upon the departure of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal who will return to New York to work with the poor there.

The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal will close the doors to the Sacred Heart Friary in east Fort Worth on May 31, 2015 after eight years of work with the homeless along Fort Worth's Lancaster Avenue. Besides their religious presence in community life, the Friars have operated St. Benedict's Mission for three afternoons a week.

The departure will not diminish services to the homeless and marginalized within the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth.

The 105-year-old Catholic Charities of Fort Worth, which has worked for years with the most needy of the homeless—families and individuals who are unsheltered—and with homeless veterans and their families, will not only continue, but it is expanding as needs grow.

The agency's services have been expanding continually, including the introduction of the "Night Outreach Program" and longer hours for other services in late 2014. Catholic Charities will partner with other local organizations in launching "True Worth" in 2016, a new central resource for the homeless.

"Through Catholic Charities of Fort Worth, Catholics in our Diocese are living out Christ's call to serve the least among us," Bishop Michael F. Olson stated. "We are thankful to the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal for joining our efforts during the past eight years of prayers and outreach to help the homeless and marginalized at St Benedict Mission. I am especially grateful for their love and devoted service to the poor among us.

"Service to our poor, marginalized and homeless brothers and sisters will continue, and increase, with Catholic Charities at the forefront of those efforts."

Father John Paul Ouellette, the Community Servant (superior) of the Friars expressed his gratitude. "We are profoundly grateful to Bishop Kevin Vann and to Bishop Olson for their support and fatherly care over the past decade," Father Ouellette said. "Our Brothers are sincerely grateful for the tremendous privilege of having served the guests of St. Benedict's Mission and for the love and fidelity of the CFR lay associates and friends."

Catholic Charities' services to the homeless and marginalized include:

- Expanded hours of service through Street Outreach Services (SOS) to those living on the fringes, particularly in homeless camps, under bridges and throughout the city, including basic needs and assistance to finding housing.
- Providing permanent supportive housing through "Master Lease" for families and individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness.
- Outreach, mentoring and housing assistance through SOS volunteers.
- Providing veterans and their families who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness with permanent housing stability through the Veterans Services program, complimented by the "Money School" program that includes intensive case management, temporary financial assistance and financial education.

- A new Night Outreach Program, with a team of Catholic Charities outreach workers that engage individuals at night that are unable to connect to homeless services during the day or who need additional services.
- Through True Fort Worth, assisting in operating a central resource facility for the homeless to access medical care, basic needs, case management, housing assistance and various other services.

“We do this work because we are steeped in our Catholic Teaching, including ensuring we are respecting the life and dignity of each person we encounter,” said Heather Reynolds, president and CEO of Catholic Charities of Fort Worth.

“As we work with the homeless, we are reminded that Jesus is in every one of us. However, it has been a critical part of our intervention that as we build relationships with our brothers and sisters, that our work does not stop at basic assistance,” Reynolds says. “In order to truly respect the dignity of every life we touch, we always strive to give hope and help that allows an individual to recognize and live out their God given potential.”

The Franciscan friars operated St. Benedict Mission from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. The space for the mission was leased from the Presbyterian Night Shelter.

In its annual report, the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition reported that its survey identified 1,944 homeless persons in January 2015. The count dropped from 2,451 last year because of new United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirements that individuals who are in temporary housing not be counted as homeless.

The Homeless Coalition findings included:

- 217 homeless people are unsheltered, an increase up from 184 in 2014.
- 193 veterans are homeless, a decrease from 282 in 2014.
- The most critical needs of the homeless are food and water as well as transportation, including bus passes.