

Church volunteers make quilts to help homeless



LYNN VENHAUS

Volunteers at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in O'Fallon gather Thursday mornings to prepare mats that are given to people who are houseless.

**BY LYNN VENHAUS
FOR THE PROGRESS**

Busy hands are happy hands every Thursday in the church basement at [St. Michael's Episcopal Church in O'Fallon](#).

That's when volunteers gather to make mats to help homeless people in the area. The community service project has been ongoing for four years, with help from other churches. They deliver the mats to the [St. Louis Christ Church Episcopal Cathedral](#).

[“The mats are blessed in church](#) and sent along, with our prayers, to the person in need. On snowy nights when they don't have any more room in the shelter, they are able to give them a mat,” said Judie Payne, who helped get the project off the ground, along with her husband, Tom.

“He was vital in helping me start the program,” she said. “When Tom and I saw this project, we really couldn't believe it was such a simple, useful project. Without Tom's help, I could not have gotten it started — he gets recycled bags, loops cut strips at our meetings and at home to make boxes of plarn.”

Tom is often the courier as well.

“Tom is our weather watch — watching for cold, rain and snow — and then he delivers the mats to the cathedral, when the mats would be most needed. It works well,” Judie Payne said. “They are so grateful.”

When the shelters are full, they hand out the mats.

Payne explained what plarn is and why this project is low cost and user-friendly. The source material is well-suited for the elements and is lightweight to carry.

“Plarn” is a plastic — made from recycled grocery bags — material that is woven into a comfortable mat suitable for those without a warm bed to use on outdoor surfaces and can withstand the elements. It won’t get wet like a blanket because it is up off the cold, wet, hard ground,” she said.

“It is relatively no cost — except for crochet hooks. We use recycle bags or new ones donated by stores, individuals or other service clubs,” she said.

Making the mats is easy to learn, Payne said, with four basic steps.

“They can be done in a group or at home,” she said. “Vacation Bible School children have helped and teenagers can use it as a community service project. These are made especially for someone from us to them.”

MORE ABOUT O’FALLON GROUP

The volunteers who gather have duties either as cutters — turning the recycled sacks into strips, folders, loopers — who make the plarn, and crocheters.

They welcome volunteers.

“There are plenty of other things for people to do,” Payne said.

[Marion Rose of O’Fallon](#) has been part of efforts for about eight months.

Debbie LaFreniere, who was part of the group, asked Rose to help because they needed people to help cut and crochet the mats.

“I believe there are people that would donate their time and energy to this worthy project or give bags or even scissors or needles to make the mats,” Rose said.

‘THE PERFECT PROJECT’

At [various times during the coronavirus pandemic](#), those who can’t get to church are encouraged to work at home.

Rose said the fellowship and the positive attitude of the group is what keeps her contributing.

“It lifts one up. I leave every time feeling I can face my issues. I feel I am a better person because of my association with this group,” Rose said.

Payne said they welcome people from other churches.

“It’s the perfect project,” Payne said.