



Roseville-Eastpointe Eastsider (MI)

## Churches, Crime Commission assist Warming Center

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WARREN - Crime Commission Secretary Jim McKnight said they started lining up before 7 p.m. every night last week at St. Edmund's Church, on 12 Mile. Dozens of **homeless** people were looking for a place to sleep and a couple of warm meals. "We've been averaging about 75 to 80 people a night," McKnight said, hours before another volunteer shift at the church, where members of the Warren Crime Commission donated their time to assist the Macomb County Warming Center by screening those who come in to stay the night.

Unlike some other shelters in the county, the Warming Center - which operates between November and March in 18 local churches on a rotating basis - does not place limits on those they'll take in.

Middle-aged single men, people struggling with alcohol or drug abuse, or those who are simply unkempt from life on the streets are provided with an evening meal, a warm bed and something to eat when they wake up. No one over the age of 18 is turned away, as long as they allow any bags they carry in to be checked in for safekeeping, and as long as they pose no danger to themselves or others at the temporary shelters.

"That's what it comes down to, the people that nobody else wants to be around, because they smell bad, and they drink or they do drugs. Even though they may have addictions, we feel they should not have to freeze to death on the street," said Kathy Goodrich, Warming Center executive director.

"We're a faith-based group.

We do this because of our faith.

It's not right to turn anybody away if you can give them something to eat and a place to sleep."

Goodrich said nightly residents are typically checked in between 7 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. After that, it's lights out at 10 p.m. following an evening meal. Another meal is served in the morning.

The Warming Center spends a week at each of its partner churches on a rotating basis during the cold weather months. In Warren, in addition to St. Edmund Church, other churches working with the group this year include St. Mark Parish on Bart near Nine Mile and Ryan, and St. Paul United Church of Christ on Mound near Chicago Road.

Goodrich said all the bedding is laundered on Sunday morning each week before volunteers move it to the next location.

The independent, Eastpointe-based nonprofit relies on donations and grants from individuals and foundations to support its offerings, which also include a day center and peer support groups at the center's office, available throughout the year on a limited schedule.

Also imperative is the support of the participating churches, whose members donate much of what is needed to house those assisted nightly.

McKnight, who is also a parishioner at St. Edmund and a store manager with Art Van Furniture, said the need is definitely there, judging by the numbers of those who spent the night at the church last week.

"It's a heart-warming feeling to be able to give back to the community, and on top of that, to be able to give back to the people who need it the most, that are out of work, that don't have a place to stay," McKnight said. "These people come in, they're sleeping in the woods in a tent, or under a viaduct." McKnight said the vast majority of those assisted pose no threat, and are willing to undergo the necessary procedure to ensure safety when they're checked in.

"Ninety-eight percent of the people are grateful to have a place to get a warm meal and get a place to sleep," McKnight said.

Others can require "a higher level of patience." "When they come in and they're under the influence, they can be a lot harder to handle. Our job is to get them to settle down," McKnight said. "These are people that would not be allowed into these other types of shelters. This is the only place they have to go, other than sleeping on the street." For more information about the Macomb County Warming Center, now in its ninth year, call (586) 321-0998.

Caption:Those seeking food and shelter waited to be admitted to the Warming Center at Warren's St. Edmund Church last week. St. Edmund, one of the Warming Center's core partner churches, offered a place to sleep and warm meals for the **homeless** population last week. Photos by Philip Southern.

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