

Branches on the Vine

News from the Archdiocese of Hartford · January 25 - 31, 2025



PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY SHARES GOD'S LOVE WITH OTHERS



From left, Maria Batick, Kathleen Martone, Peggy DeCusati and Carol Zaffino meet at St. John Bosco parish center for a monthly knitting session.

It began with a dream. A dream about knitting prayer shawls.

“Every night, a voice in my head told me this would be a wonderful thing to do; I could even visualize the shawls and passing them out,” says Maria Batick of St. John Bosco Parish of Branford. “The voice was persistent and told me, ‘just do it.’”

She did, and almost 18 years later, the ministry still brings God’s love to people. At the time, Batick was president of the Mutual Respect Committee at Yale New Haven Hospital, where she started an initiative to distribute “comfort shawls” to patients.

Prompted by a voice she believes was the Holy Spirit, she went to senior centers and churches throughout the region, asking them to knit shawls for the sick and dying.

“The chaplain would say a prayer before we handed them out,” Batick recalls. “People who were dying received them, and later their families kept them because they meant so much.”

Upon retiring in December 2015, she started the prayer shawl ministry at St. John Bosco Parish, which includes St. Mary and St. Therese churches, where the knitters continue to distribute shawls and blankets to the infirm, baptized infants, those confronting a crisis and anyone who requests one.

“They’re given away for many occasions,” she says. “We don’t ask. They are in the rectory to be taken. They are made with love, given away with love and received with love.”

Joanne L. Fresco, the parish pastoral associate for sick and elderly, also gives pocket prayer shawls with miraculous medals to homebound people she visits. Hundreds were even given to schoolchildren for their backpacks.

They have so much meaning. One man takes his with him when he receives chemotherapy, Fresco adds. Another person, she adds, holds it when he’s uncomfortable or praying.

Batick says she is convinced the Holy Spirit inspires the knitters because there have been many occasions when someone received a shawl and responded, “How did you know that was my favorite color?” Or, “How did you know this color matched my room?”

“I tell the knitters, ‘You don’t know who you’re knitting for, but it will go to the right person because it is directed by God’s love,’” she says.

In the past, Batick recalls a bold orange and red prayer blanket she had on hand for more than a year before giving it to an elderly man, who began to cry in appreciation. “How did you know I was a fireman?” he asked her. The colors reminded him of flames.

The group of eight women gathers monthly at St. Mary Church and prays for God’s guidance during their knitting sessions. They later continue their work at home.

The Blessed Virgin is the patron of the ministry, which Batick began in her honor in appreciation for “everything she has given me.”

“These shawls are a gift from God,” she says. “The knitters are so happy to make them. Whenever I tell them stories about the happiness their shawls give people, they want to do even more. Only when they get to heaven will they understand all the joy they gave to people.”

(The prayer shawl ministry of St. John Bosco Parish meets at the parish hall, 731 Main St., in Branford, on the second Wednesday of the month from 9 a.m. to noon. For more information, call Maria Batick at 203.488.7426.)

Story by Joe Pisani



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, January 26 at 6:00 PM

Frassati on Tap · Trinity Bar, 157 Orange Street, New Haven

Karen A. Avitabile, editor of the **Catholic Transcript** magazine for the Archdiocese of Hartford, will be the Jan. 26 guest speaker at Frassati on Tap. She will discuss "How to Balance Your Faith in the Workplace," and provide meaningful tips on how you can stay true to Christian faith in a secular work environment. The meeting will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. in a private room at Trinity Bar, 157 Orange St., New Haven. A Q&A will follow.

Frassati New Haven is a fellowship of young adult Catholics (and interested non-Catholics) in their 20s and 30s who desire to gather together to worship the Lord, grow in their faith, serve those in need, and build bonds of authentic friendship. To learn more, visit facebook.com/frassatinewhaven.

February - May at 6:30 PM

Discerning Hearts Hosted by the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are hosting several opportunities for women ages 18-35 who are discerning a call to consecrated life to meet the sisters at a tea, followed by a hour of adoration at several of the Archdiocese's parishes.

Feb. 19, Avila House, Newington

Mar. 19, St. Mary, New Haven

May 21, St. Francis, New Britain

Questions? Contact Sr. Colleen at 203-506-4653

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March 19, 2025

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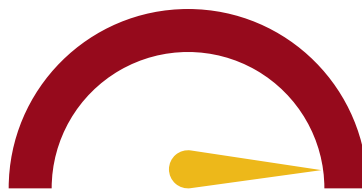


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2024 Archbishop's Annual Appeal

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96.4% for 2024
\$9,645,767.35 of \$10M goal

