

Soft clothes, soft hearts guide group

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

For somebody suffering from cancer, or for grieving parents whose baby has died at birth, 'tis the season to be something other than jolly.

In the eyes of The Handiwork Ministry, these are the folks who most need to be remembered with loving gifts — at holiday time and throughout the year.

Now in its fourth year, the Avon-based ministry pools its talents and abilities to create clothing for people in need from Livingston and surrounding counties. Items are distributed through Catholic Charities; hospitals; nursing facilities; Birthright; hospice care; domestic-violence programs; and other crisis-care agencies.

The ministry, which totals approximately 10 regular members and several contributors, meets once a month at St. Agnes School in Avon.

"You don't have to have any kind of religious affiliation, just an interest in needlework," said Julie Flanagan, who belongs to St. Agnes Parish and is a charter member of The Handiwork Ministry. Flanagan said the ministry is always hoping to expand its membership base and has taught its needlework skills to area Girl Scouts.

Members collect donated materials for knitting and crocheting, and often supply their own goods as well. These are transformed into such items as baby clothing; caps for people undergoing chemotherapy; and slippers for patients to wear during chemo treatments.

More often than not, The Handiwork Ministry targets people that mainstream society may have forgotten. "Life does have value, and it's up to us to see it and find it," Flanagan stated.

One special project — making



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Corinne Schillinger knits a hat Oct. 29 at Avon's St. Agnes School during a meeting of The Handiwork Ministry, which creates clothing for people in need.

hats for cancer patients — began after a friend of Flanagan's had lost her hair due to chemotherapy and asked for something to cover her bare head. Another notable effort occurred last year when the ministry made blankets for babies who were stillborn or died within a few days of being born. Some parents buried the babies in the Handiwork Ministry-produced clothing, and other families kept the items as mementos.

"We've had nurses tell us that parents have left the hospital, holding on to the blankets," Flanagan said.

"We wanted to acknowledge the baby would remain bright in their memories," said one member, Corinne Schillinger, who originated the idea.

According to Flanagan, The Handiwork Ministry got started three years ago when she and other volunteers made blankets for a Catholic Charities of Livingston County-sponsored "baby shower" for underprivileged families. A collaborative at-

mosphere guides the ministry — "We all bounce ideas off each other," Schillinger said. However, Schillinger describes Flanagan as "our fearless leader" who goes above and beyond with record-keeping and other organizational work. Flanagan, in turn, said she's grateful for the close friendships she has gained with fellow Handiwork Ministry members.

"I've been disabled for four years, and these people have been such a source of support and encouragement to me," said Flanagan, who has struggled with a back injury and a hip replacement.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For details about The Handiwork Ministry, call 585/538-6431, 226-6108 or 226-2510.

MISSION NEWS

“What they need is food, medicine, and clothes, and, most of all, lots of love — the love of Jesus.”

Angela and Kisse are two of the orphans lovingly cared for by Sisters in Tanzania. Their parents died from the AIDS virus. Other children in the Missions are left orphans from war or civil strife. Some parents are so poor they need help caring for their little ones.



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12/03

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