

# Warm Cap Project helps more than 1,000 stay warm

BY ROSE ROCCISANO BARTO  
Special to the Chronicle

FINDLAY—As a nurse, Karen Bjorksten got used to giving of herself. Long shifts, patient care, staff support — it was all part of her job before she retired from Mercy St. Vincent Medical Center two years ago. Once she reached that milestone, however, she was left wondering how she could still give back while enjoying retirement.

“I had such a rewarding profession in nursing and was so blessed because every day I could go to work and make a difference in someone’s life,” says Ms. Bjorksten. “I needed to find a ministry.”

The answer for her and other members of Findlay St. Michael the Archangel was the Warm Cap Project.

Over the last two years more than two dozen women with the Warm Cap Project have knitted or crocheted more than 1,000 caps, scarves, mittens and headbands that are distributed free around the area. The women of the are giving their time and talent to those they

will likely never meet.

“They are concerned about people who are in need for whatever reason,” says Precious Blood Sister Mary Lou Schmersal. “I’ve noticed they are starting to become more aware of groups or individuals who might be in need, and are reaching out.”

The Warm Cap Project was started at St. Michael’s by Sr. Schmersal, who had organized a similar group in Toledo. It seemed the perfect way to allow seniors or those who could not attend meetings outside the home to work in a ministry.

The group meets once a month to create and share ideas, but many members work from home and those who cannot attend the meetings send in their items.

The group has a stash of yarn and different knitting and crocheting items available for use. While Sr. Schmersal has patterns available, many women have their own specialties and patterns.

“One lady is just a masterful knitter and she tries new things all the time. Some people like to decorate with flowers,” says Sr. Schmersal.

Items include caps for adults and chil-



Photo courtesy of Precious Blood Sister Mary Lou Schmersal

Cathy Ritche shows special flowers she makes to enhance the caps she makes as a member of the Warm Caps Project at Findlay St. Michael the Archangel. The group has made and given away more than 1,000 caps, scarves, mittens and headbands over the past two years.

dren, extra soft caps for cancer patients and tiny caps for preemies. They have been distributed to area soup kitchens, schools, hospitals and other agencies. Many of last year’s caps went into food baskets given out by the parish, and this year some caps will end up with charities that give away winter coats.

Ms. Bjorksten crochets items in her spare time, while watching television and even in the passenger seat on the way to vacations. She makes caps and headbands that are adorned with intricate flowers. A typical headband takes about two hours, and she tries to make one or two a week.

“There are so many ministries,” she says. “This was a way to connect with others. It doesn’t have to take a lot of time.”

Kathy Hull says she grew up knitting but put it aside due to work and family commitments. In 2001 she picked up her knitting needles again and says the Warm Cap Project was a natural.

“It was nice to meet with other knitters every month,” she says. “And it was a ready-made project to help other people and do something I like at the same time.”

For her, and others, it’s a way to combine a hobby with helping others.

“It wouldn’t make sense to sit around and not help other people,” says Ms. Hull. “That’s not why we’re on this earth.”

For more information on the Warm Cap Project, contact Sr. Schmersal at 419-304-3819.

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## Pope

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ularity, is that it has not, as of yet in the U.S., drawn more people, or those who have left the church, back to Mass or the sacraments in measurable numbers, according to a Pew Research Center poll.

Some observers have said the pope’s impact shouldn’t be measured in returning Catholics, but in the restored image of the Catholic Church and the number of Catholics who feel proud of their faith again thanks to Pope Francis.

Eileen Burke-Sullivan, associate theology professor at Creighton University in Omaha, told CNS in March that in visits to various parishes in the country, she heard numerous stories of parents’ grown children who have been inspired by the example of the pope and want to come back to the church. She also said parishes should be prepared for these returning Catholics and be sure they are ready to serve as “field hospitals” welcoming all, as the pope has said they must do.

This fall, the pope had a lot of eyes on him during the extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican. The pope opened the first working session,

but never expressed his views during the gathering. At the synod’s end, many news outlets said the final report was a “setback” or “loss” for the pope, because it did not include the midterm’s conciliatory language toward people with ways of life contrary to church teaching, or reflect the theme of mercy, the pope so often articulates.

German Cardinal Walter Kasper, who gained attention during the synod for his proposal to make it easier for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to receive Communion, told an audience at The Catholic University of America in Washington that Pope Francis is “a pope of surprises.”

In using words that almost sound like something the pope would say, the German cardinal said Pope Francis has “succeeded in a short time in brightening up the gloomy atmosphere that had settled like mildew on the church.”

He also acknowledged that the pope has his detractors, saying: “What for some is the beginning of a new spring, is for others a temporary cold spell.”

The cardinal said the pope doesn’t “represent a traditionalist or a progressive scheme,” but instead “wants to lead faith and morality back to their original center,” to the heart of the Gospels.