

Cleveland sister assists outreach to area homeless

By PAT MORRISON

CLEVELAND — One of the last things Jesus did on the night before he died — in addition to instituting the Eucharist — was an act of intimate service: He washed the feet of his disciples. Today, a Precious Blood Sister in Cleveland works behind the scenes to ensure that this act of compassion and care is repeated thousands of times over for the poor of Cleveland each year.

InterAct Cleveland, an interreligious partnership in greater Cleveland, sponsors an annual event in February or March advertised as the “Homeless Standdown.” During the event, the city’s poor and homeless are invited to come and enjoy the generosity of the local community.

Precious Blood Sister Mary Ann Mozser writes that “hundreds and hundreds, probably thousands, attend the three-day program. It is a gathering like none other. The camaraderie among the folks who provide services and the folks who receive the services is a rare gift to both...”

As vice-president of Mission and Ministry at St. Vincent Charity Hospital in the city, Sister Mary Ann’s main task in the Standdown is to organize the podiatry services for the event. She recruits podiatry residents, invites an area Catholic school to collect socks to give away. The hospital’s director of pharmacy secures the foot powder and antifungal creams.

“The poor who come for this foot care are absolutely delighted to receive two pairs of new clean socks” along with the powder and cream, she says. “It’s almost like Christmas morning for them!”

“With a warm smile and a ‘hello, my friend,’ the homeless are invited to take a seat, take off their shoes and socks and let the doctor take a look at the major means of transportation



With a warm welcome, homeless people are invited to take a seat, take off their shoes and socks, and let the doctor take a look at the major means of transportation for the poor...

Photo courtesy of St. Vincent Charity Hospital

for the poor,” she says. The podiatry residents check over each person’s feet for problems, offer suggestions about foot care and, for more serious problems, invite the person to make an appointment at the hospital’s podiatry clinic.

“I am always so impressed with the gentle touch and kindness expressed by our resident doctors of podiatry as they handle the worn and weary feet of the homeless... Besides foot care, it is the gift of respect and compassion that makes the day. What a gift!”

This year eight podiatry doctors and directors from St. Vincent’s — men and women of various faith traditions — offered their free services during

the event at the Cleveland Convention Center.

A medical pavilion also provided health screenings of all kinds: blood pressure, cholesterol, dental items and screenings, and a quick mini heart and lung check provided by various doctors and nurses.

In a barber shop section, visitors received haircuts and had beards trimmed. A social services section enabled individuals to apply for various support services, such as learning how to acquire transportation help. Photographers were on hand to donate their skills to provide photo IDs — and also offer portrait photos for people who seldom have such a valued personal item.

This year’s event also included a huge clothing section where one could find every type of wearing apparel: boots, shoes, outerwear, underwear, dresses, blouses, shirts, trousers, sweaters and more. In addition to being able to “shop” for clothing necessities, the homeless also chose free toiletries.

Another part of Sister Mary Ann’s behind-the-scenes-organizing is collecting new T-shirts from various events and giving them to the

homeless men, women and children who attend.

“We also have a group of ladies from St. Noel’s [parish] who knit caps and scarves for adults, which we take along to distribute.” Since the Standdown always takes place in winter, these are especially welcome, she says.

In addition to much-needed services and personal items for the homeless, “there was good food to nourish the body and entertainment to nourish the spirit,” Sister Mary Ann says. Perhaps, most importantly, she adds, the event offered “a warm and loving environment to comfort the souls of those who so often live every day on meager subsistence.”