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Jessica Glasshoff of St. Patrick Parish in Gretna and a volunteer with Least of My Brethren pours coffee at a facility that helps the homeless in Omaha.

PROGRAMS BRING HELP TO THE HOMELESS

Thu, 11/19/2015 - 9:31am admin

BY MIKE MAY [SHARE](#)

Catholic Voice

Dave Harvey's street ministry began one cold night two years ago while working with the Salvation Army's Winter Night Watch program in Omaha.

As he was distributing meals and coats to the needy, he met a woman who said she was forced to sell her belongings and use her last \$30 to buy a tent to take up residence by the Missouri River.

He was inspired to help her. Later that night, gathering some blankets, sleeping bags and other items, he sought her out at her river bank home. His experience opened his eyes. Returning the next day, he met about a dozen of the poorest of the poor – people living "off the grid," who homeless shelters seldom see.

That was the beginning of the Least of My Brethren, one of at least two independent street ministries that have joined food pantries and homeless shelters to help the needy in Omaha.

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Since 2013, Harvey and his wife, Cheryl, of St. Patrick Parish in Gretna, have grown the loosely-knit ministry to more than 240 people who donate items through its Facebook page.

Youth groups from the parish in Gretna and St. Patrick Parish in Elkhorn also hold drives for survival items such as blankets, tents, tarps and sleeping bags, coats, socks and other clothes. Cash donations are not accepted.

Harvey, who works full-time as a Midwest area sales manager for IBM, walks the river banks and railroad tracks every Sunday afternoon to distribute donations. He also helps the homeless by giving them bicycles for transportation.

“Over half of what we do now is helping people get stable and eventually move into apartments,” Harvey said. “We also work with Heartland Family Service, which helps them find apartments.”

But once in an apartment, they often have little more than a blanket or sleeping bag, which revealed another need – furniture, Harvey said. Now he gathers donations of sofas, tables, chairs and beds to help people make their apartments feel like a home.

Picking up donated items during the week, he stores them in his garage and a rented storage unit. He and his wife deliver the furniture on Saturdays.

Harvey was inspired to start the ministry by the urge to help someone in need.

Now, he tries to inspire others by showing them how their donations are used to meet a need, posting photos of the furnishings in the apartments on the group’s Facebook page.

“We do this so people can feel a personal connection to those they’ve helped,” he said.

BLESSED FAMILY STREET MINISTRY MARKS 14 YEARS

Dave and Cheryl Harvey’s Least of My Brethren joins another street ministry that has operated for 14 years in Omaha.

James Parsons’ Blessed Family Street Ministry provides a mobile lunch program using food donated from parishes throughout the city and prepared at Holy Family Parish.

Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to noon, Parsons makes six stops from downtown to south Omaha, delivering up to 400 meals a day.

“There are always people waiting at the stops,” he said.

Well-known on the streets, Parsons also makes regular stops each week in north Omaha, south Omaha, downtown, and areas along the rivers and creeks where he knows people live. He distributes blankets, coats, clothing, food and other needed items.

Support also comes from archdiocese grants and direct donations to his ministry through St. John Vianney Parish in Omaha, he said.

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THE CATHOLIC VOICE

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