

ARCHDIOCESAN NEWS

HANDY HELPER

Malta Mobile Ministry volunteers provide much-needed cargo service for agencies

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John Barnes previously used his own vehicles to pick up food for the pantry at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, stuffing large boxes and crates into a small space and sometimes blocking his side and rear vision.

Now, he's getting help from the Malta Mobile Ministry. Earlier this month he and volunteer driver Brian Abel Ragen quickly loaded cases of cereal, milk, vegetables and meat from Operation Food Search into the back of the ministry's new Ford cargo van.

After a stop at a Straub's store on Kingshighway in St. Louis to pick up more food, the van headed back to the food pantry operated by its Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference at the parish in Ferguson. The food will help the pantry feed 40 to 50 families a week.

Volunteers such as Ragen, a member of the Order of Malta, and the van are a crucial part in the effort, said Barnes, a parish volunteer who manages the pantry. "This service is a great help," Barnes said. "We don't want to turn away food."

Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski blessed the van Dec. 8; by the end of the month it began supporting Our Lady of Guadalupe's pantry and helping the Criminal Justice Ministry furnish apartments for men recently released from prison. Previously, the Criminal Justice Ministry rented a moving van.

The Missouri Area's Order of Malta Mobile Ministry is modeled after a ministry the order established first in California, and this is one of the first operations outside that state. Its purpose is to assist agencies serving people who are poor and underserved.



PHOTOS BY LISA JOHNSTON | lisajohnston@archstl.org | twitter: @aeternusphoto

Brian Abel Ragen, a member of the Order of Malta, quickly and easily loaded food into the new Malta Mobile Ministry van at Operation Food Search in St. Louis on March 9. The food pickup helps the pantry feed 40-50 families a week.



"This service is a great help. We don't want to turn away food." — John Barnes

The ministry focused initially on helping the Criminal Justice Ministry, St. Patrick Center and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Through February, the effort has involved 83 service hours, covering 846 miles and delivering two tons of food in addition to furniture.

Greg and Cathy Gantz are co-chairs of the Missouri area for the Order of Malta America Association. They helped establish the mobile ministry in St. Louis. Randy Weber, a Malta Knight, is the director of the mobile ministry in St. Louis.

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Brian Abel Ragen teamed with John Barnes, food pantry manager at Our Lady of Guadalupe, to load food for the pantry.



“The need exists throughout the archdiocese,” Weber said. “The organizations we serve all struggle with transportation and drivers they can rely on to be there on a regular basis to serve their needs.”

The cost of the van was underwritten by the Order of Malta American Association. Members of the order in St. Louis are covering operating costs. “Not only did the order want to support the sick and the poor through its financial support, but it was important that the members of the order also can participate hands-on in serving the needs, whether it’s getting up early in order to make a food run to the food bank or moving furniture for clients,” Weber said.

Cathy Gantz said “these agencies free up dollars for other ways to serve. We’re there



“I like feeling that we’ve really made a difference. To help a man who literally has no bed to sleep in makes me feel good.” — *Brian Abel Ragen*

as that partner, that extension of their team.”

Thomas Casey, executive director of the Criminal Justice Ministry, said the van saves his agency time and money. The volunteers, Casey said, “are an important sign to our clients that the

community is supporting their success.”

Greg Gantz called the work a witness to the Catholic faith: “To live out our faith life, it requires us to demonstrate our belief in the mission that Jesus left us with. It’s a clear example of that

>> Order of Malta

The American Association was founded in 1927 as the first association of the Order of Malta in the Americas. It has more than 2,000 Knights, Dames and volunteers in over 30 areas working with the poor, sick and incarcerated and giving witness to the Catholic faith.

The Missouri area has about 110 members.

The order is one of the oldest institutions of Western and Christian civilization. Present in Palestine in around 1050, it is a lay religious order. Its 13,500 members include professed friars and others who have made the promise of obedience. The other Knights and Dames are lay members, devoted to the exercise of Christian virtue and charity.

The Order of Malta remains true to its inspiring principles, nurturing, witnessing and protecting the Faith and assisting the poor and the suffering. Today the order carries out these activities in over 120 countries.

faith that we’re demonstrating through these works of mercy.”

It’s “being the face of Christ to all through our service,” Cathy Gantz said.

Ragen, the driver picking up for Our Lady of Guadalupe, also has helped haul furni-

ture. “I like feeling that we’ve really made a difference,” Ragen said. “To help a man who literally has no bed to sleep in makes me feel good.”

It’s an extension of the work the Knights have done for more than 900 years, he added.



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