

# Consider the poor - THE NAZARETH KNITTING CLUB

[ David Halliday ] Editor Melbourne Catholic

The Sisters of Nazareth are proving there's always something you can do to help the needy, no matter your situation.

Demand for handmade artisan wares has never been stronger thanks to online marketplaces like Etsy. For a handcrafted woollen blanket you could expect to pay anything from \$60 to \$200 plus shipping.

With winter coming on, the elderly residents of Nazareth House in Camberwell want to make sure Melbourne's poorest people have access to handmade knitted products at no cost. To do so, they're taking up their knitting needles with Melbourne's poor in mind.

Nazareth House is a home for the aged run by the Sisters of Nazareth and accommodates 100 residents. The Sisters have been based in Camberwell since 1929 when then Archbishop Mannix requested that the Sisters come to Melbourne. The group are particularly motivated by a passage in St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25:40. 'Truly I tell you, whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

'We knit scarves and blankets for the homeless,' says nurse and Nazareth House resident Sister Margaret Anne Hill. 'We turn it into a fun social gathering every Wednesday morning.

We call ourselves the Nazareth, Knitting Club.'

The group started in 2014 and currently consists of 13 residents and five volunteers. 'We get together every week for two-and-a-half hours and knit for the homeless.' The age of the knitters spans from 85 to 97 and the number of handmade blankets has surpassed a hundred.

After they've finished knitting the blankets and garments, the group distributes their wares to people in need of them. So far they've donated the fruits of their labour to St Vincent de Paul and local families in need, a women's refuge, Mother Teresa's Sisters in Fitzroy, and Briar Terrace in Fitzroy Street, run by the Sisters of Charity. Both places run by the Sisters serve men and women who come in off the streets.

'We donate everything we make. We don't sell the items here ourselves, even though we could make a packet!' Sr Margaret laughs. 'But we don't want to sell them-we want to give them directly to the needy.'

Each time the group gathers, the benefit is twofold, Sr Margaret says sharing the company of others and the joy of making a difference for the common good. 'It's quite a social event really,' says Sr Margaret. 'We talk and cover so many topics over a cup of tea.'

Neither the Nazareth Knitting Club nor Sisters of Nazareth are much used to blowing their own trumpet.

'We do things quietly as a rule. Because it's a giving thing,' says Sr Margaret. 'It's not a sensational story,' she admits. 'But it is good.'

It's a small gesture, Sr Margaret says, but she hopes it inspires others to assess what kinds of actions they could take themselves to help. 'We're not looking for donations; we're not looking for wool, because people have been very generous donating wool to us. We just want to remind people to consider the poor and the needy. We'd love to give them so much more than blankets, beanies and scarves. So just consider what you can do to help the poor.'

The Nazareth Knitting Club serves as proof that when it comes to meeting social challenges like urban poverty and homelessness, everyone can contribute something.





