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Friday, January 8, 2010

## Good Shepherd Center: Offering home, help and hope

Story and photos by Doris Benavides

[text only version](#)

For two to three hours on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, Lovers of the Holy Cross Sister Rosaline Vu heads out from Good Shepherd Center's Languille Emergency Shelter, searching for homeless women around downtown Los Angeles.

From the shelter's mobile outreach van, she hands each woman she meets a bag with a sandwich, fruits and dessert. She serves them hot coffee, while a volunteer --- who always comes with her --- adds cream from a pot she carries in the van. If they request, women also receive a blanket, clean clothing and hygiene items.



To each woman, Sister Rosaline extends an invitation to the Languille Shelter. "You can come take a shower and have a hot meal, but the best is if you could stay," she tells the women, most of whom she knows by name.

The women, inevitably, greet Sister Rosaline with joy, sometimes with tears in their eyes, for it often seems like she is the only one on the streets who cares for them.

"You ask why I do this? This is why," she says, after hugging several women. She knows that one day at least one of them will respond to her invitation to leave a life of despair. "This is like breathing for me!" she adds with a smile.

### A place of acceptance

There are more than 73,000 homeless in Los Angeles County and 24 percent of them are women. That is why, for more than a quarter century, Good Shepherd Center has offered its services to women who are not only without homes, but often without help or hope.

Operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in coordination with the Lovers of the Holy Cross Sisters, the Belmont Avenue facility has provided shelter, food, clothing and the opportunity for single homeless women of all ages to regain independence and self-sufficiency through employment and permanent housing of their own. Most importantly, perhaps, Good Shepherd offers these women acceptance --- even if they want to continue living on the streets.

At the Languille Emergency Shelter (also known as the Drop-In Center) in Echo Park, women may come in for a hot meal, a shower, laundry and crisis services --- all for free --- and if they wish, they may leave and return at any time. The one caveat: women are not accepted at the shelter if they are drinking or using drugs.

"Women may stay for up to six weeks and if they agree, then they are placed in transitional or permanent housing," explains Sister Julia Mary Farley, Good Shepherd Center's director since its inception in 1984.



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On a yearly basis, Good Shepherd assists more than 1,200 homeless women and children. It serves more than 70,000 meals, responds to more than 10,000 phone requests for aid, and provides housing services at other facilities, including accommodation for mothers and their children. About 350 women benefit through the crisis service. These efforts are accomplished through the support of generous donors and fundraisers.

### 'Regaining' life

Lorraine Morland is one of the women who saw the emergency shelter's entrance as a revolving door. She showed up to shower and eat a hot meal, but was "scared to stay," she said. On a few occasions, she stayed for several days, but her substance addiction always kicked in.

Then one day, about 15 years ago, one of the sisters lifted her from the street on a rainy early morning when Morland was lying on the ground, soaking wet. Today, after living on the streets for nine years, Morland is on the center's staff, as a part-time cook. She has married, reconnected with her children, and "regained" her life.

She credits the perseverance of LHC Superior General, Sister Anne Lanh Thi Tran, who was then Good Shepherd's outreach coordinator, and always invited Morland to visit the emergency shelter to take a shower and eat lunch.

"I thank God and the sisters for giving me this opportunity," she told The Tidings one evening while preparing dinner for the sheltered women.

Often, she says, Good Shepherd's chapel was her refuge, as it is for many of the residents or visitors of the two-story building that can house 21 women at a time.

Flor de Maria, who has been living in a car with a girlfriend, might be the next woman to respond to Sister Rosaline's offer.



"I really want to go tomorrow for the Christmas party," she said on a Dec. 11 morning after Sister Rosaline invited her to a Christmas celebration at the shelter. "I will try to come."

That could be a good start of the year for Flor de Maria --- a way to a new life. But even if she does not respond to the invitation, Sister Rosaline will continue bringing her and every homeless woman she meets her compassion and care.

*For more information about Good Shepherd Center, visit [www.gschomeless.org](http://www.gschomeless.org) or call (213) 250-5241.*

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