



The Diocese of Knoxville

Living our Roman Catholic faith in East Tennessee

MEDIA ADVISORY
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Diocese distributes nearly \$369,000 to assist fire victims

Grants will help families achieve long-term recovery

KNOXVILLE — Bishop Richard F. Stika today announced that the Diocese of Knoxville has distributed \$368,906.79 to victims of the deadly and destructive wildfires that swept through the Gatlinburg area of East Tennessee in November.

“Because of the love and generosity of people across East Tennessee and beyond, the Diocese of Knoxville is able to assist families who have been struggling to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of these fires. We are pleased to join others in the community who have come together to help. We offer these gifts as a sign of our love for the victims,” Bishop Stika said.

Specifically, the funds will assist 23 families, composed of more than 100 people, who experienced losses at three significant levels. Eight families that lost their homes received grants of \$20,000. Ten families that lost their apartments and personal belongings received grants of \$14,000. Six families that suffered partial sustainable losses received grants of \$6,000. The St. Mary’s Mobile Medical Clinic, which initiated service to patients in the Gatlinburg area after the fires, will be awarded approximately \$11,000.

As part of the diocesan effort, Catholic Charities of East Tennessee distributed \$21,945.00 to stricken families for home repairs, rent assistance, hospital bills, and various household expenses.

The Diocese of Knoxville worked with St. Mary Catholic Church in Gatlinburg to identify victims and assess their needs. Father David Boettner, a vicar general of the diocese, said all victims who requested assistance received grants.

“In the Bible, the Good Samaritan responded to someone in need with love. We do likewise,” Father Boettner said.

“We know that these grants aren’t going to fully cover the losses that people sustained, but it is charity in the best sense. It is an expression of the love of the people throughout the Diocese of Knoxville, and throughout the country, that made donations out of love, so that people who were harmed by the fire would know that they are not alone,” Father Boettner said.

In addition to the grants distributed by the diocese, St. Mary Catholic Church provided more than \$138,000 to families in need during the early stages of the recovery. The St. Mary funds helped families find emergency housing

and allowed them to purchase food and personal items.