

CLARE

GALLERY

at the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry

For Immediate Release
May 9, 2006

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“Enfolded”: Clare Gallery exhibits shawls with special meaning

Hartford — From time immemorial, shawls have been garments of comfort and security. The Clare Gallery in downtown Hartford celebrates a group of extraordinary shawls and the solace they provide in an exhibition entitled, “Enfolded: Shawls Wrapped with Love and Prayer.” Presented in conjunction with the Prayer Shawl Ministry, the exhibition runs from Thursday, June 8, until Sunday, July 16. An opening reception and artists talk will be held on Monday, June 12, at 6:30 p.m.

Prayer shawls — also called comfort shawls, peace shawls or mantles — are made and donated by people who want to reach out in a special way to those in need of comfort and solace, as well as in celebration and joy. Some of the shawls are knitted or crocheted; others are quilted or woven. The shawl maker infuses the garment with prayers and blessings for the recipient, whether or not they know who that recipient will be.

Some of the shawls in “Enfolded” are intended for women. Others are designed specifically for men or children. Many are embellished with beads, feathers, shells or charms. The beauty of the shawls lies not just in the workmanship, but in the symbolism behind it and the spiritual connection between the maker and recipient.

Begun in Hartford in 1998 by Janet Bristow and Victoria Galo, the Prayer Shawl Ministry (www.ShawlMinistry.com) has become a world-wide phenomenon and embraced by many different religious groups. It has been written about by publications ranging from *The New York Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* to *Creative Knitting* and *Body and Soul* magazines. Prayer Shawl groups have formed throughout the country, with some shawl makers creating the garments at regularly scheduled meetings and others working on their own. The shawls may be given directly by one person to another, or donated to a larger shawl ministry that then presents them to individuals as the need arises.

Prayer shawls have been delivered to people in need of comfort in Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, Uganda, Russia, the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, and hundreds of neighbors closer to home. They are given to those who are ill; as a comfort after a loss or in times of stress; as an aid to prayer or meditation; or to mark significant events such as marriage or commitment ceremonies, births, graduations, birthdays, anniversaries or ordinations.

“The shawl is an embrace. It’s a hug. It’s tangible,” Bristow said. “You’re essentially knitting your prayers, good intentions and thoughts into the shawl and keeping the receiver in those thoughts and intensions. Those who have received these shawls have been uplifted and affirmed, as if given wings to fly above their troubles.”

The “Enfolded” exhibition in the Clare Gallery will feature a variety of shawls as well as explanations of the symbolism in them, prayers that are presented with the shawls, and notes from recipients.

The Clare Gallery primarily features exhibitions that emphasize world religious or interfaith themes, and social justice themes, either on a global or local level. It is housed in the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry at 285 Church Street. The Center is part of St. Patrick – St. Anthony Church, a vibrant downtown faith community.

The Clare Gallery’s hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Fridays; Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The Gallery and all related events are free and open to the public. Free parking is available directly across from the church. The facility is handicapped accessible. More information may be found on the church’s website at stpatrick-stanthony.org or by calling 860-756-4034.