

# Groups continue to aid homeless during pandemic



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Apr 06, 2020 12:41 PM

Homeless shelters and ministries continue to operate during the coronavirus pandemic, providing relief to Sanford and Lee County's homeless, which numbered 373 people when counted during the nationwide Point in Time event in January.

The city's S3 Housing Connect Homeless Task Force is doing its best to help shelters including the Outreach Mission of Sanford and Bread of Life Ministries, Mayor Chet Mann said in an email last week.

"Our S3 project is still very active. We are not having meetings, obviously, but we are working ... to prop up our shelters as much as we can," Mann said.

Paul Tate, director of the Outreach Mission of Sanford, said both the men's and women's shelters were full, each reaching its capacity of about 18 people.

The men's shelter is at 705 Chatham St. and the women's at 507 S. Third St.

"We're taking the necessary precautions as it relates to the houses," Tate said. "We're wiping down surfaces and staying clean."

All residents must be in the shelter by 8 p.m., Tate said. Social distancing is being practiced when possible.

Donations, including food, are being left on the front porch and workers wear plastic gloves and scrubs when handling and sanitizing the products, Tate said.

So far, he said, there have no reported cases of COVID-19.

"Thank the Lord," he said.

Quite a few others have turned to the Bread of Life Ministries at 219 Maple Ave. Overnight sheltering is not offered, but the facilities are available five days a week at varying times, according to Pastor John Clark, who works with the outreach ministry.

Normally, he said, workers prepare between 35 and 40 boxes of food to give to the homeless, but in recent weeks the number has climbed to nearly 50.

“People are coming in from Harnett and Chatham counties,” Clark said Monday.

The ministry has received donations of food and hand sanitizer to help keep workers safe.

In addition, health and COVID-19 prevention classes are being offered, Clark said.

On Saturday, Turners Chapel and Connect Church donated 717 pounds of food, Clark said. Last week, bagged lunches were donated, he said.

All efforts are helping to keep the homeless off the streets and preventing the spread of COVID-19, Mann said.

“We understand that an unsheltered person is much more likely to contract and spread the coronavirus.”

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