

## A NEW(OLD) LEADER



By Brian Tombaugh of The News-Sentinel

Sally Ley, left, founder of The Franciscan Center, an organization that works to help the needy through services such as distributing sack lunches to the homeless, recently replaced Keith Burns as chief executive officer of the group. Burns had been Ley's successor in 2000.

# SANDWICH DAYS



**Ley:** Is founder of the center

## Sally Ley reprises her role as leader of The Franciscan Center.

By KEVIN KILBANE  
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It started with a hungry woman, a sandwich and a belief in befriending the poor.

Fifteen years later, Sally Ley finds herself back in a familiar role: the leader of The Franciscan Center, an organization she helped found to aid the needy.

"One of the missions we try to focus on is it is not only the poor who have needs," said Ley, 55, who returned Aug. 1 as the center's executive director. "We have a need to associate with the poor."

Ley replaces Keith Burns, who succeeded her four years ago and left July 31 to become development director at Bishop Luers High School.

Ley will bring with her a constituency of donors who worked with her during her first stint running the center, from 1989 to 2000, Burns said.

"She is going to bring the originality back to it," he added. "She is going to bring spirituality to it."

Ley had been a homemaker for two decades when she

felt called 15 years ago to help homeless women and families.

A family friend had recently taken in a homeless family — father, mother and baby — who had been sleeping in a tent at Johnny Appleseed Park, she said. Ley thought the woman needed to be around another woman and children, so she would invite her to her house during the day.

One day her guest told her about a woman friend who was homeless after being released from residential mental-health care. Ley took the woman's friend a sandwich, and the idea for the Franciscan Center was born.

Along with making sack lunches for her own children, Ley then began packing extra lunches she would take out to homeless people she found living under local bridges.

In 1989, she and friend Jean Kelly founded the Franciscan Center to provide shelter for homeless women leaving institutionalized mental-health care. They expanded the ministry two years later to provide shelter to homeless men.

The center, in the former Sacred Heart Catholic School on Gaywood Drive, changed its mission in 1999. Ley

Here are the walk-in hours for The Franciscan Center's St. Anthony's Food Pantry and St. Clare's Clothing Closet clothing bank. The center is housed in the former Sacred Heart Catholic School, 4643 Gaywood Drive:

◆ Food pantry: 9-11 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays

◆ Clothing bank: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, and 8-10 a.m. Saturdays

◆ For information about making donations, volunteering or the St. Peter's Sack Lunch program, call 744-3977.

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and its leaders decided to focus on providing food and clothing for the needy while allowing other local programs to provide housing for the homeless.

Ley retired as executive director a year later, but she stayed involved by serving on the center's board of directors. Though affiliated with the Catholic Church, the nonprofit Franciscan Center is self-sufficient financially.

"I am real happy about being back," she said.

She hopes the center can expand its ministries, but she wants to re-acclimate herself to its daily operations before proposing any changes or additions.

Ley inherits a ministry offering four major programs:

◆ St. Anthony's Food Pantry provides about a bag and a half of groceries to about 125 needy people every Tuesday and Thursday morning, she said. The pantry assists about 1,000 people a month. People must register and can receive food

only once a month, but they don't have to meet any specific income guidelines.

The center purchases most of its food — about 600,000 pounds annually — from Community Harvest Food Bank. Businesses, churches and individuals also donate food to help stock the center's shelves.

◆ St. Clare's Clothing Closet offers gently used clothes for \$2 per grocery bag, Ley said. The clothing bank also gives away some clothing, shoes and winter clothing.

◆ St. Peter's Sack Lunch program delivers 800-1,000 free bagged lunches each Saturday to needy people in east-central Fort Wayne. Recipients must sign up.

◆ The Toy Chest provides a free toy and book monthly to each child who comes with his or her family to get food at the pantry. Families also can buy additional toys at heavily reduced prices.

Tuesday, more than a dozen people waited outside for the Franciscan Center's food pantry to open. Once inside, they worked their way

through the pantry line as volunteers dropped food in their grocery bags or boxes.

On the other side of the room, volunteers prepared sack lunches for delivery on Saturday. They quickly placed individual-size packages of potato or snack chips into row after row of brown paper lunch bags, which filled the tops of six long tables.

Lowell and Pat Barney of Fort Wayne have helped pack sack lunches each Tuesday for four years.

"It just makes you feel good that you are helping people," Pat, 70, said.

Ley is assisted by three part-time employees. But the Franciscan Center depends on about 400 volunteers a month to accomplish its work. About 300 of the volunteers are schoolchildren, who combine a field trip and community service in one trip.

"That is what the Franciscan Center is all about — creating opportunities for people to serve the poor in our community," Ley said.