

## **Prayer Shawls for Newtown, CT**

### **The Knitting:**

The tragedy in Newtown is so enormous it's hard for many of us to let ourselves even think about it. I limited my exposure to the details, unable to get beyond the only certainty that mattered--innocent children and caring educators went to school one day and never came home. A few short minutes of unspeakable violence have wreaked a lifetime of heartache for the parents and families, who are now supposed to somehow find a way to get out of bed in the morning. After deflecting the specifics for a week, I suddenly knew I needed to knit a prayer shawl for the families of Newtown, but realized just as quickly that my one shawl was not enough.

Maybe other women would want to knit one also? So, I asked. I was amazed by the generous outpouring of support by so many knitters willing to join me in sending a message of hope and healing to Newtown, especially during the holidays, during flu season, during vacations, and job changes, money troubles, and business travel, snow storms, frozen shoulders, and rusty knitting skills. Selflessly, over forty knitters worked on fifty gorgeous shawls with love and commitment. It became a cathartic experience that allowed us to slow down, contemplate the Newtown losses, and be thankful for our own blessings.

After two weeks of this dedicated knitting, most of the shawls were finished and blessed during a powerful church service at Pilgrim Church, lead by Rev. Todd Vetter and Rev. Leah Horton. The prayer shawls happily spent the hour on top of the Communion table, commanding our attention and prayers and thoughts of healing and grace for the Newtown families.

### **The Delivery:**

As I was driving away from my house, I yearned desperately to return home, and I visualized the trip back up my driveway, later that night. What would happen in between these two ordinary moments in my driveway that would start and end this chosen day?

As I headed onto the highway, shawls sitting obediently in the second row, tank full of gas, lunch money in my purse, GPS sighted on Newtown, my thoughts turned to what was ahead. Would I see such grief I wouldn't be able to handle it? What sorrow-filled darkness would surround the town, hanging from street lights and storefronts? I was afraid of the wounded community I might find but wouldn't know how to navigate. I also questioned whether the church would really need the shawls after all. I had read so many articles about the nation's outpouring of gifts that had overwhelmed the small, peaceful town. Maybe they had received cartons full of prayer shawls since my phone call? What then?

Driving alone in a Suburban with thirty-five prayer shawls is a bit intimidating, yet unmistakably comforting, somewhat like being the bus driver to thirty-five silent ministers. God's grace is everywhere, but I had the responsibility of safe passage for my divine charges. Yet, being alone with so many prayer shawls, made by faithful, caring, and compassionate souls, had a direct affect on me. God was speaking from each stitch, and if I just stopped my mind from trying to organize the details of what was to come, I would go where God wanted me to be. I no longer guessed at what I might find, but left myself open to what might unfold. I just followed the prayer shawls because they knew where to go.

Newtown is quintessential New England and was serene and peaceful. It was a warm, sunny, winter day offered as a true gift to the wearied spirit. I ventured past the flagpole and to the right of the Old Meetinghouse and up the hill. When I walked through the door of the Newtown Congregational Church with six bags overflowing with beautiful shawls, Janice, the Associate Pastor, was on her way out to a meeting. She stopped mid-step, raised her arms with joy, and asked "Are these the prayer shawls from Duxbury!!??" Not expecting anyone to remember who I was never mind provide fanfare, I answered, "Why, yes, they are," with a bit of a relieved smile. Janice proclaimed, "It was meant to be."

Janice Touloukian, I believe, would be an excellent ice-breaker at the most awkward of social events. Her smile and welcoming cheer were backed up by a deep sincerity. She immediately set me at peace with her warmth and engaging conversation. At that moment, I, too, knew that this was meant to be. Earlier that week, Janice had heard about the blessing of the prayer shawls during the service from an old friend at Pilgrim Church, but she didn't know they were intended for Newtown. Yet, she was almost waiting for me, it seems.

I also met with Matt Crebbin, the Senior Pastor, and Vicky Truitt, the Office Manager, two more strong leaders who seemed capable of carrying the burdens in Newtown. Well-received by gracious people who were truly happy to accept a gift from afar, I delivered the prayer shawls into their welcoming and grateful hands. With this connection solidly made, the shawls started the next part of their journey. May God continue to be present along their path, guiding these

prayer shawls through a community just beginning its difficult journey of sorrow and remembrance, hope and healing, peace and grace.

**The Blessing:**

Until I was fully engaged westbound on the MassPike, my day in Newtown loomed momentous and fearful, extraordinary with events and circumstances unknown, emotions to be tested, sights to prove unbearable. But, in reality, it was what every day of our lives should be--a simple yet purposeful day spent allowing ourselves to follow God's lead. It was about the prayer shawls and the part they needed to play in the lives of the knitters before they could attend to the healing of the recipients. A circle of faith and compassion that yearned to be completed. My day as a conduit was a blessing. The whole experience was, and is, after all, God's story played out through us.

*Amy Holbrook  
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Blessing of Prayer Shawls for Newtown, CT.  
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