

MERCY ON WHEELS

SISTER LIBBY FERNANDEZ HELPS OUT HER HOMELESS NEIGHBORS ONE BIKE RIDE AT A TIME

Sister Libby Fernandez rings the bell of her electric tricycle as she pedals slowly down the sidewalk. Ahead, a person is stirring under a thin blanket.

“Good morning! Would you like a cup of coffee?”

Such is the daily routine for this 59-year-old Sister of Mercy since she retired from directing Loaves and Fishes, Sacramento’s largest homeless services organization, three years ago. Every morning, rain or shine, she loads her bike with hot coffee, energy bars and hygiene products before taking her regular route through the city.

The goal? Serving coffee, yes, but it’s more about serving her homeless neighbors in hopes of getting to know them, showing them dignity and, possibly, helping them move one step further toward a stable life off the streets.

Sister Libby says this “second act” was revealed to her during an eight-day silent retreat, when she asked God what her next chapter should involve. What could she do that integrates all the things she loves: building relationships, serving homeless individuals and cycling?

By the end of her retreat, the vision for Mercy Pedalers had taken root.

Sister Libby launched the organization with just one souped-up, motorized tricycle and six volunteers; Mercy Pedalers now has five loaner tricycles and more than 100 volunteers who bike through their own neighborhoods to bring coffee and consideration.

Sister Libby says she doesn’t worry about logistics or the funding for her compassion project.

“All of that comes naturally. It’s easy to spread the word when you’re passionate about something. I just love what I’m doing, and I love to share it.”



Sister Libby Fernandez pedals compassion.



DO IT YOURSELF

Interested in helping your homeless neighbors? Sister Libby offers these simple suggestions (always keep your safety in mind and trust your instincts if you think someone might have potentially dangerous mental health issues):

- ▶ **Start a conversation.** “I usually ask, ‘How is your day going?’ ”
- ▶ **Offer something practical.** “Soap, shampoo, razors, nutritional bars and flashlights are always useful.”
- ▶ **Carry a services list.** “Then I can call the local shelter, for example, right then and say, ‘Jim needs a shower today. Can you make sure he gets in?’ ”