

Happy Monday to all,

On July 28, 1932, the U.S. Army, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, forcibly removed the “Bonus Army” of World War I veterans from their encampments in Washington, D.C. using tear gas, bayonets, and tanks and finally the burning of the veterans' camps.

Following World War I, Congress promised veterans adjusted compensation bonuses to be paid out in 1945. However, during the Great Depression, many veterans, facing unemployment and poverty, marched on Washington in 1932 to demand immediate payment of these bonuses. While authorities persuaded some to leave, a large group remained, and tensions escalated. Clashes erupted between the veterans and the police attempting to evict them. Police shot and killed two veterans. In response, President Hoover ordered the army to clear the camps. The incident became a symbol of the government's perceived insensitivity to the plight of the unemployed during the Depression. The veterans eventually received their bonuses in 1936, when Congress passed legislation authorizing their payment.

California has the largest number of homeless veterans in the nation, with an estimated 11,000 veterans experiencing homelessness. Many factors contribute to this issue, including mental health conditions, substance abuse, and the challenges of transitioning back to civilian life. Nearly one in four active-duty military and military veterans report having some form of mental illness, with over 6000 military suicides occurring annually. In their attempt to achieve universal stability and peace, military personnel often sacrifice peace within their own minds and bodies.

Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the inherent dignity of every human being. This is particularly true when assessing the scope and quality of veterans' rights, including their right to healthcare, housing, and employment.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton provides resources and support to address the unique needs of veterans. Catholic Charities' Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) provides various services to homeless veterans and those at risk of homelessness such as mental health services, housing assistance, and employment training.

SSVF provides wrap-around supportive services such as rental assistance, utility payments, household items, childcare, transportation, medical/mental health referrals, affordable health care, housing navigation, money management, and food/nutrition assistance. Catholic Charities connects veterans with community resources as well as Veterans Administration Medical Centers, as needed.

Catholic Charities is proud to serve those who have served their country — many in dangerous, traumatizing circumstances — only to find that life out of the service can be fraught with daily peril of another kind: debt, homelessness, mental health crises, substance use disorders and piles of paperwork that would overwhelm the most organized among us.

Those who come through our doors find a welcoming community. First, they must do the one thing that veteran's advocates say does not come easily to this population... ask for help. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton is more than happy to serve as a voice asking our communities to assist our proud veterans, in need of our help, to provide that help.

Just as the veterans living in the encampments in 1932, unhoused veterans in 2025 are looking for just enough to get them integrated back into civilian society in a productive and healthy way. Estimates suggest that approximately 350 homeless veterans reside within the Alpine, Calaveras, Mono, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne counties that are part of the Diocese of Stockton.

If, as a community that is thankful for the sacrifices our veterans made-and continue to experience- we share just a little of what we have, Catholic Charities will be able to achieve the goal of not one single veteran, and their family, becoming or remaining homeless. With community support and funding, Catholic Charities can continue to provide the full scope of services necessary to provide our veterans with the peace and security that they selflessly fought to provide to all of us.

Blessings,

Deacon Mike