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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(SAN FRANCISCO, March 18, 2015)

The Archdiocese of San Francisco is, along with the Catholic St. Vincent de Paul Society, the largest supporter of services for the homeless in San Francisco. Every year, it helps many thousands of people through food, housing, shelter programs for people at risk including homeless mothers and families, and in countless other ways.

St. Mary's Cathedral is a huge part of that program, and does more than any other Catholic church. The Cathedral itself serves hundreds of homeless people giving them food and shelter, as an integral part of the San Francisco Interfaith Council's efforts in that regard, for example, opening its doors for shelter and food for five weeks over the holidays.

This sprinkler system in alcoves near our back doorways was installed approximately two years ago, after learning from city resources that this kind of system was being commonly used in the Financial District, as a safety, security and cleanliness measure to avoid the situation where needles, feces and other dangerous items were regularly being left in these hidden doorways. The problem was particularly dangerous because students and elderly people regularly pass these locations on their way to school and mass every day.

When the system was installed, after other ideas were tried and failed, the people who were regularly sleeping in those doorways were informed in advance that the sprinklers were being installed. The idea was not to remove those persons, but to encourage them to relocate to other areas of the Cathedral, which are protected and safer. The purpose was to make the Cathedral grounds as well as the homeless people who happen to be on those grounds safer.

We are sorry that our intentions have been misunderstood and recognize that the method used was ill-conceived. It actually has had the opposite effect from what it was intended to do, and for this we are very sorry.

We have also now learned that the system in the first place required a permit and may violate San Francisco water-use laws, and the work to remove this system has already started, and will be completed by the end of the day.

For more information, please call Larry Kamer at (415) 290-7240 or email:
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