

Start-up Questions to Consider Prior to Ministering to the Un-housed

1. Assuming your parish community feels a call to minister to the un-housed in your community, the most important questions to be answered are: What and how do we help ease the suffering of those who are un-housed?
 - Begin by speaking with those who are currently un-housed and those agencies that are currently supporting them to determine what is needed and the priority of those needs.
 - Determine what resources your parish has available to address those needs.
 - Ecumenical efforts are normally more successful than individual efforts in addressing the needs of the un-housed as there is strength in numbers and everybody brings their individual strengths and gifts which when combined make joint efforts stronger.
 - Explore what other faith-based organizations in your local community are currently doing and where your resources may be best utilized.
 - If there isn't a current ecumenical effort in your area, explore all other available options including reaching out to other faith-based organizations in your local community to try to establish an ecumenical approach to address the needs of the un-housed.
 - Only after you have determined that there isn't any possibility for an ecumenical effort to address the need should you consider launching an effort on your own, in which case you need to address the following questions:
 - Is your parish community committed to a ministry to the un-housed
 - Have you checked with the agency insuring your property as to what conditions they may place upon you in order to minister to those who are un-housed?
 - Do you have adequate staff and persons willing to engage in this ministry to minister to those who are un-housed?
 - Are there other organizations associated with your parish who use your spaces that need to be informed and what might be the impact on them?
2. Your next major task is to determine how your proposed ministry to the un-housed will be viewed by your local government and your neighbors. Efforts to minister to the un-housed are often negatively considered by your neighbors. Without a positive campaign to dispel fears regarding the un-housed your efforts to ease suffering may actually do the reverse, hence the need to effectively address community concerns prior to launching any effort. The following process should help you answer the question: How will you interact with the surrounding community and your local jurisdiction regarding your ministry to the un-housed?
 - Begin by speaking with your local government officials especially those responsible for permits, police, and fire to determine what process you will need to follow and do your best to solicit their support.
 - Wherever possible address any concerns resulting from discussions with local officials with a Memorandum of Understanding that spells out what you intend to do and how you will mitigate their concerns to make sure your local officials are supportive of your effort.
 - Inform your neighbors of your plans to minister to the un-housed; wherever possible go door to door and leave information with your neighbors regarding plans to minister to the un-housed.
 - Hold a town-hall meeting with your neighbors and local officials to inform everyone of what you intend to do to minister to the un-housed.
3. Assuming you have the support of your local officials by mitigating their concerns for safety and welfare and you have informed your neighbors you are now ready to move forward to do the detailed planning and then implement your ministry to the un-housed.