

Report on religious groups providing housing

Blaine R. Hammond+

The Bishop's Task Force on Homelessness

People interviewed:

Sara Vander Zanden, "Facing Homelessness," has been housed at University United Methodist Temple, now housed at the Society of Friends, University Friends Meeting

Bill Hallerman, "Catholic Community Services," King County

Arthur Padilla, "ROOTS," housed at University United Methodist, now in the process of moving due to sale of the property

Mari Mitchell-Putnam, Administrator, University Lutheran Church, "Elizabeth Gregory Home"

How these ministries got started

Facing Homelessness: The founder, Rex Hohlbein, a residence architect, moved his office into Seattle about 2010 after being in Woodinville. He started meeting homeless people and started conversations, found that the people didn't match his stereotypes. He gave a TED talk on his response: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpanM1yPbk>.

Catholic Community Services: They are a sister organization with Catholic Housing Services. They have been doing that outreach for 30 or 40 years. They developed the program with staff. They evolved as family centers reacted to needs for the poor. They saw need in late 70s and 80s. They started doing shelter work originally; then parishes started to interact with homeless people. From that, they got into housing with homeless folks; originally they were just trying to respond with a day center and a shelter.

ROOTS: University United Methodist Church started the overnight housing of young people, decided they were in over their heads, and contracted with ROOTS, a secular organization. There is a dichotomy for many of their clients in finding themselves in the basement of a church, having been oppressed by religious institutions. In spite of the challenge that the church has committed to, they have done so wholeheartedly.

Big challenge related to non-normative sexuality.

University Lutheran, the Elizabeth Gregory Home: The pastor at the time was involved with a Washington DC organization that started Luther's Place. He brought up that model to the congregation who named it after a deceased social worker who worked with homeless women. After incorporation and after the church raised money with campaign drive, they became their own non-profit in 2005. The congregation felt like they had given birth. They house it; the home pays rent, but still very connected with the church. The Pastor is always a member of the Board, plus one other church member, that is required.

What work do they do with the homeless, and how did it develop?

Facing Homelessness: It developed through Rex Hohlbein's personal experiences. The closer you come the more you feel, the more you feel the more you're compelled to act. You become unwilling to accept the situation. It helps to define experiences to bring people closer. Look people in the eye, hold their hand.

A couple of programs – Windows Kindness, people can come and grab tents, tarps, sleeping bags, backpacks, emergency supplies. The most important thing is connection, eye contact. Another program, runs on a Facebook page with 52,000 followers. They are often sharing photos and stories. They express needs on page, community meets them. They may pay

for car tabs or make rent payments. They work on how they can leverage the community to end homelessness. Block Project: building homes in residential backyards. They are able to achieve YIMBY from residents for that. They also Manage properties. People call for help when facing homelessness, people who are scared and overwhelmed.

Catholic Community Services: They have three offices in King County. They are a multi-service agency. In King county, 2/3 of what they do is shelter. They also assist by being a mental health and chemical dependency provider. They also have family programs like tutoring, and things with elderly – that’s the other third of what they do.

ROOTS: ROOTS provides emergency overnight shelter for young people.

University Lutheran Church, the Elizabeth Gregory Home: They operate a day center for homeless women in a building, provide sleeping quarters, laundry, showers, cook breakfast and lunch. Recently went from 5 days a week to 6. They also have a transitional house, where seven women can learn to live in community again, pay rent if they can (percentage of their income). Two to a room, cook together, kitchen together. The day center came later. Residents have to be clean and sober, or if in process, involved in 12-step. There are weekly house meetings with a staff member. EGH was the first day center in the north end of Seattle. It works with city to get bus tickets so people can access other sites for homeless services.

The church also supports other ministries, Teen Feed, Roots and Share/Wheel work. Share/Wheel is a nightly shelter. Teen Feed is meals, seven nights a week, ages 13-24, three nights a week there, three nights at University Congregational, three nights at University United Methodist. 20 to 60 are fed; the church charges no rent. They share info about U-district. Share/Wheel is a shelter, an organization of self-managed shelters. They host a site, women’s only because day centers are there. They come in at 6:00 on nights when Teen Feed is not there. Need to be out of hall by 9:00. Saturdays they stay in all day unless church has special event. When Teen Feed is there, they wait until Teen Feed is out at 8:00 or 8:30. They pay \$250 a month to help with utilities. University Lutheran is one of original congregations that founded ROOTS, which used to be in different congregations each night. University Lutheran is also part of a giving program. Some of clients are physically there for other ministries as well as ROOTS.

What are the considerations for a site?

Facing Homelessness: Although they are not a religious group, they decided to be housed in a church because it is affordable. There is a need to be central and accessible and churches have properties with those features. Throughout the country, churches are partnering with non-profits. The churches also benefit because the partnership gives churches revenue. Churches have a philosophy as well as property, and that enhances the program’s ability to connect with them.

Catholic Community Services: There is no overarching kind of vision for facilities; CCS just responded as quickly as they could. Some are bigger, purchase and lease, and they have shelters rotating in 30-some churches. There is a gift and a price in them. The gifts are that there are lots of congregations, and the ministry excites folks. But they are hard to manage. The older CCS has gotten, the harder they try to get to a facility-based project. They do partnerships with government; more cities and counties than state. They don’t have overriding vision, they just respond to need. Both clergy and lay to respond to the question of whether and how to help. Most partnerships aren’t with Catholic churches. The churches have to be clear that the space isn’t to proselytize.

ROOTS: The agency grew up around the facilities that the church had. The church invested in improvements for the purpose; showers and so forth in the basement. Below-market rent that

church can provide is one reason for using churches, but subsidizing by churches reduced the resiliency of ROOTS when they needed to move. So low rents led to difficulty in moving. They were like kids getting kicked out by their parents. There have been significant emotional impacts.

University Lutheran, the Elizabeth Gregory Home: The church does not own the house, it's owned by another agency, leased by EGH.

What is the sense of mission; for Christians, how does it relate to the baptismal covenant?

The people I interviewed did not understand what I meant by the relationship to the baptismal covenant. The only real answer to this came from Catholic Community Services: If you look on their website at the mission & vision statements there is a "We believe" statement. They are particularly focused on the gospel call to service and justice. This is more than a baptismal service. They welcome people from all traditions, including Muslim folks, and folks of good will. There has to be a passion for helping the poor and vulnerable. Sometimes they find volunteers through the church doors.

Who does the work?

Facing Homelessness: They have five paid employees, a volunteer board, and volunteer attorneys & contractors, David Tremaine law firm.

Catholic Community Services: Almost everywhere they have volunteers. Almost every place also has professional staff. Some programs started with volunteers. Some will start a parish service as volunteers, then begin to wear out, come to CCS and ask them to take over. They have a big youth tutoring program; there are large group of youth tutors. Faith services are a big source of volunteers. They can also reach out through bulletins, talks. Meals are provided with funding, but volunteer groups provide them. This is a good way to get volunteers involved; to prepare and serve meals, which is a good opportunity for one-to-one face time. Some volunteers might become paid staff.

ROOTS: They are not the largest agency but they are not small; they have a 1.4 million dollar operating budget. They have 30 staff, 19 FTEs. Operate as an emergency shelter, 8 pm to 8 am. People have to take everything they bring with them when they leave. They have 250 volunteers that are actively engaged. They have recruited and trained thousands of people. The majority are college students or young people. At a guess 75% are young people, the rest are community groups, including churches, who maybe volunteer a meal regularly. Of folks who actually work one-on-one in the shelter, some stay overnight, some work 8-11, some work 6-9 in the morning.

University Lutheran, The Elizabeth Gregory Home: Some members of congregation have volunteered, but mostly financial.

What about security?

ROOTS: The church pays for a security company, which manages the exterior – this is a brand-new arrangement. Prior to that, it was managed "however." Security has been chaotic for years. The church and ROOTS should have both taken responsibility earlier. Nobody wanted to spend the money.

University Lutheran, The Elizabeth Gregory Home: The biggest problem is that there are clients in common between EGH and other ministries; what if clients mess up in one place, are they barred from others? They rarely bar anyone from the property. Physical assault or a number of minor infractions would do it. Mari Mitchell-Putnam is in charge of that.

How do you raise your money? Where does it come from?

Facing Homelessness: 85% from individual donors. They started off grassroots from their Facebook page, which they still maintain. They have 20 or so major donors (\$5,000 or more), otherwise “many hands make light work.” 600 people make monthly donations of \$5 to \$20. Also money from grants; King County to support block project, and Bullock Foundation, one-time in 2018 from Pearl Jam.

Catholic Community Services: The biggest size and scope now, probably $\frac{3}{4}$ of funding comes from gov't funding of some sort at all levels. There is still a huge amount that is public support or contributions from institutions, community fundraisers, etc. Once a year there is a Catholic Campaign for the Poor and CCS gets a chance to get in the door of every Catholic church to preach and present, the first two weeks in December. They get monthly donations from people. They also get funds from foundations. They have a braided funding approach now. So many programs are already supported by private donations. You need gov't support to do this work; if churches don't want to do it themselves, they will turn to CCS.

ROOTS: There are a couple of different sources. City, county and state dollars for emergency shelters is a big chunk; $\frac{1}{3}$ or maybe higher. Private foundations, family foundations, business partners are probably $\frac{1}{4}$ of that. The difference is from individuals. They have no real problem with taking gov't money. There are always strings attached to gov't money in terms of outcome expectations. Gov't funding does not cover the full level of expectations. Expectations cost money to implement. The governments never fund fully, but they expect fully. Foundations feel like they're working at a discount rate.

University Lutheran, The Elizabeth Gregory Home: Aside from rents for different programs, they take special offerings. EGH also does an annual dinner, and several members attend that. University Lutheran contributes mostly money instead of actual physical involvement.

How do you relate to the government and other NGOs?

Facing Homelessness: We need to know about Mary Place, Chief Seattle Club, Psychiatric Clinics and contractors.

Catholic Community Services: You need government to stay with you on these issues. Politicians respond to pressure. Government has blinked to neighborhood pressure. It's getting harder and harder. But you have to just keep trying and stay centered and not lose your cool. It's easier now because so many partnerships with faith communities and government have been going on for so long that they call CCS if there is a need. CCS is the biggest non-gov't provider of social services in the state. Problem now is not growing but trying to limit the amount of growth. The more the Episcopal Church can do, the better!

ROOTS: University of Washington and frats/sororities are doing community service with ROOTS.

How do you relate to the surrounding congregations and community?

Facing Homelessness: There is a NIMBY situation with businesses. There is no good solid answer to how to deal with NIMBYs. But there's no place for the people to go.

Catholic Community Services: We have been pretty successful at “wearing people out with goodness.” Every new site is a new community. They have a good program, but it's lots of work managing problems that come up. Some places set up community boards, but CCS tries

not to do that in an ongoing way starting out, just responding to things. Who can you call to talk about issues? There is no magic formula, just continuing to talk to them.

ROOTS: Congregations in the area are all involved with homelessness. There is a lot of interaction. The staffs meet monthly; they all coordinate services. All of the partners meet regularly. It is not formal, but all talk and relate; there is a dynamic ecosystem in the U-district.

What advice do you have for people wanting to start such a ministry; what are best practices?

Facing Homelessness: Make use of a couple of software systems that make organization possible. “Little Green Light,” “Smart Sheet,” nothing should remain in our heads, it should all be written down. Hire good people, treat them well. That means something different for non-profits than for profit-making corporations. They all work from home on Mondays; that is a recovery day. They keep a fun work environment. It is important to bring light, laughter and hope. There are struggles with growth. Remember that customers are not consumers. Funding is a risk. They tend to work over capacity. Find good people to hire who are able to work for that salary. To start your own program, survey what’s already happening in your communities. What gaps are there? Maybe find some revenue. Find out what’s happening before leaping to “Oh, we’ve got to do it.” Before providing shelter, look at what’s already happening. Space is a really big thing.

Catholic Community Services: Sit with the congregation and leadership, ask what need is in community, is there a particular population or subpopulation you’re dealing with, what do you want to do; some are easier and some are harder to start. What would it cost? Ask size and scope questions. Where are you going to get the support? Explore what you’re called to and what your resources are, who you are partnered with. Sometimes encourage people to start small. So many needs, they try to help, but sometimes have to say no if the model will not work. there has to be a plan that would keep that ministry going. Sometimes things go for a while and then energy, interest, money dissipates. If there’s an anchor, maybe the ministry can be handed off to CCS or some other institution; but not all of them. I think it’s wonderful that you are looking at this and would encourage leadership to invest time in considering this ministry. It would be great and CCS would be happy to help. They would definitely help.

ROOTS: If there are churches that want to do something there is always plenty to do. There are increasingly more and more ways to be involved. There are a thousand non-profits in Seattle; you don’t have to do it alone. Find out who the people are and how to work with them. There are many ways to participate. You have power in the fact that you have community. ROOTS is a smaller agency, it needs help. Partner with those kinds of agencies. You don’t have to do it alone, don’t have to create anything at all. Do not create anything new; there is nothing heroic in doing that.

University Lutheran, The Elizabeth Gregory Home: Check what is already in your area, see what is already being done. Talk to the people you are hoping to help and ask what they need. Depending on where you are, other things may be needed. Be realistic about the size of what you do and what it will take in terms of space, people and costs. Make sure what you’re doing is what you’re called to do and what you can afford to do. Logistics can get lost. Chances are you haven’t thought of everything but you’ll probably think of most everything if you try. University Lutheran had people go out and do research about what was needed. Call Mari at University Lutheran if you want to talk some more. It makes a big difference to have community involvement and engagement. People become addicts because they’re homeless, not vice-versa.

Many kids are kicked out of homes because of being gay, they have women leaving violence, promised jobs didn't materialize, or people were laid off.