

# BEST PRACTICE FOR A \_\_LOCAL PARISH\_\_ MINISTRY TO THE UNHOUSED

## INTRODUCTION:

Use of church open spaces and parking lots as a safe space for those who are unhoused and living out of their vehicles. Safe parking will be available daily for overnight parking by our “shelterees”. [Note: 60% of the unhoused live in a vehicle. Another 40% live in organized or unorganized “tent cities.” For management reasons the Parish is best served if they pre-select vehicles or tent cities, but not both.] “He who welcomes a stranger welcomes Christ.”

## PURPOSE:

As part of the Body of Christ we are called to seek Christ in everyone we meet, to work for justice and peace *and respect the dignity of every human being*. We will use our church open spaces and parking to provide a safe and secure space for those who are unhoused for overnight parking and access to hygiene and cooking facilities (minimally potable water, a drain and electricity).

## REQUIREMENTS:

### Facilities:

- The Episcopal Church Insurance Company has been notified of the Parish’s plans. [There is no additional cost involved for providing temporary shelter to “shelterees”.
- Establish the square footage (or percent) of the parking lot of the church which will be set aside for safe parking for up to XX vehicles or YY tents (*specify exact number*). [That ‘set aside’ should have minimal impact on the Parish’s Sunday religious services.]
- A 24/7 porta-potty site and a weatherized water spigot and wash sink (typically this is the minimum required in the local code) will be situated near the parking lot for guests to use when church is locked.
- The church kitchen, restrooms and showers will be used by guests (*optional but encouraged*).

### People:

- Two or more parishioners will provide leadership for the ministry.
- Two or more volunteers (both from the church and the community) will be needed to staff the church when it is open for use by our guests (7 – 9pm and 6 – 8am).
- During extreme weather events the Parish may want to have a plan for their unhoused “shelterees” to come in doors overnight.

### Budget:

- One time funds to construct the weatherized water spigot and wash sink and properly install (on a level surface) the porta-potty or porta-potties.
- Continuing funds for consumable hygiene supplies, porta-potty rental/service, cloth towels for showers (optional), added electrical & water costs, waste management, etc.

### Community:

- Memorandum of agreement **or Temp Use Permit** as needed with local civil jurisdiction.

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- Community Meeting to inform neighbors held at least 30 days prior to beginning of Ministry. (*This is a critical best practice.*)
- Police and fire are notified at least 15 days before beginning of Ministry. Ensure that local law enforcement is willing to instantly remove problem people from the Parish's "**Temporary Shelter**"; that is, the housing being offered is temporary shelter and NOT a residence. Accordingly the unhoused on Parish property **do not** enjoy the protections of the State "Landlord-Tenant Act".

### OPERATIONS:

#### People:

- Once the Vestry approves, two or more parishioners provide leadership for the ministry under the supervision of the Rector.
- Two or more volunteers (may be from both from the church and the community) staff the church when it is open for use by our guests (7 – 9pm and 6 – 8am). [Note: Involve willing neighbors at the outset of the Ministry – *this is a critical best practice.*]

#### Facilities:

- The church is open between the hours of 7 – 9pm and 6 – 8am for "shelterees" to use the restrooms and showers (church to provide hygiene supplies including towels).
  - The local Parish shall establish a written plan as to how to supervise/manage the use of the Parish's facilities and grounds during this Ministry.
- The kitchen will be available between the hours of 7 – 9pm and 6 – 8am for "shelterees" to prepare their own food. "Shelterees" using the kitchen are responsible for cleaning up, washing their dishes and disposing of their garbage and trash.
  - The local Parish shall establish a written plan as to how to supervise/manage the use of the Parish's facilities and grounds during this Ministry.

#### Security/Safety

- How "shelterees" are vetted and identified as valid users of the parking lot (instant background checks are required before admission).
  - Background checks of guests.
    - Vehicle identification (license numbers, ~~title, insurance~~).
    - Execution of an agreement between Guest's Committee Leadership and the Parish regarding each party's rights and responsibilities.
- Ministry is known to local police and fire before operations begin.
- Request local Police to discretely check (do a drive-by) on the parking lot a couple of times during the night.
- Develop a written "steps to take" to de-escalate a stressful situation and when to call for help for the use of the "shelterees" and/or Parish Ministry members.
- Volunteers need to be present in the church to supervise use of restrooms, showers and kitchen while the building is open.
- Volunteers will open and lock up the church building for their respective shifts
- Emergency first aid supplies are located in the kitchen.

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### Community

- Immediate neighbors and the local community should be involved from the outset. Note that creating a safe place for the unhoused or “shelterees” pulls them off the local streets. Local residents benefit from the absence of the unhoused or “shelterees” outside their homes and businesses.

### **ADMINISTRTION**

- It shall be the duty of the Ministry Leadership to create and maintain a record of all “shelterees” and vehicles on a daily basis for the subsequent use of the Parish, the Episcopal Insurance Co, courts and law enforcement if needed.
- In addition a file containing any and all records related to medical and police incidents shall be separately maintained.