Sacred Streets
A Congregational Tool to Address Homelessness

Houses of worship can become effectively engaged in addressing homelessness near their location with a few simple steps that have been proven by a larger network of experienced homelessness service providers. This approach was crafted by contributions from the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care, The Poverello House, The Fresno Rescue Mission, Every Neighborhood Partnership, The FPU Center for Community Transformation, The Fresno Housing Authority, Fresno County Behavioral Health Services, and the Office of the Mayor, as well as other agencies with experience addressing homelessness.

We encourage faith institutions in areas impacted by homelessness to identify a definable geography of sacred space in those areas and equip a team to choose and implement approaches that achieve solutions. It is recommended this includes:

Identify an Advocate
in your congregation to drive the effort. This is a person in your faith institution who deeply cares about homelessness, who has the approval and support of leadership, who is willing to get some basic training, who will learn about the constellation of resources available to those who would help, who can maintain focus and stay at it, and who will gather with other current and potential advocates semi-annually.

The Advocate establishes a relationship with the network of homelessness service providers for advice, training, referral and tracking. These organizations and people can help you:

- Marie Rodriguez at Westcare
- Shawn Jenkins at WestCare and the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care (FMCOC)
- Cruz Avila at The Poverello House
- Don Eskes or Rob Cravy at Fresno Rescue Mission
- Doreen Eley at the Fresno Housing Authority
- Dawan Utecht at Fresno County Behavioral Health Services
- Fresno Police Department Homeless outreach

Building & Training a Team
of 5-10 people who care and want to do something, getting them trained and organized. This training could include:
The Mayor’s Faith-Based Partnership Cabinet

- A session provided by Behavioral Health Services called *Mental Health First Aid*
- Welcoming a team from the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care to do an intro
- Sending the team on FMOCOC homeless outreaches to gain experience
- Participating in the annual *Point in Time* count
- Doing a ride-along with Fresno Police Department
- Recruiting a diversity of talents and life-situations for your team, from retirees with extra time to people with experience in mental health, housing, addiction, etc.
- Researching your neighborhood by gathering data using already available tools at FPD.

**Prepare your resources & strategy:**

- What does your faith institution have that could be leveraged for this purpose – such as a spare closet to turn into a pantry, a truck to haul belongings, a small fund to help with temporary housing, an empty house or building, people with specific talents relevant to what homeless people need, etc. Do an asset survey of your congregation to discover this.
- Devise a specific plan in consultation with the network above – what you know your congregation can appropriately do given its resources and limitations? (Then share this with the Mayor’s Faith-Based Partnership Cabinet):
  - **Examples** of work that Sacred Streets Volunteers could do:
    - Do relational outreach to get to know homeless folks in the area
    - Create a repair team to deal with vandalism or clean-up
    - Establish a process to handle food emergencies
    - Provide pastoral care for someone in a medical crisis
    - Apply the Continuum of Care’s Interview Assessment tool in your area to understand the needs of particular homeless people and link them to services. (It has a long name: *Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision Assessment Tool*, affectionately called VI-SPDAT)
      - Have your congregation become a MAP (Multi-Agency Access Point)
      - Have someone in charge of data tracking – interactions, outcomes, etc.
- Devise a strategy to help the whole church understand and participate, as well as deal with the inevitable issues and encounters that arise for members or other employees not on the team.
- Partner with another congregation in developing resources and sharing the burden

Convened by the Fresno Pacific University Center for Community Transformation