

**Providing Shelter for the Homeless:  
What's Been Done & What Needs To Be Done**  
A story from Christ Church Cathedral

Cincinnati's biggest shelter for people who are homeless, the Drop Inn Center, can no longer house everyone who comes to its door at 12<sup>th</sup> and Elm. In response, a pickup team of churches and social service agencies has created an overflow shelter that will get the city through the winter without denying shelter to those without a home.

People from the Christ Church Cathedral and other Episcopal organizations were right in the middle of it—and will stay in the middle of it as the team moves on to considering a more permanent solution.

Here's the problem:

- Although many people who are homeless work at least part-time, affordable housing is disappearing from the city core.
- To make matters worse, the recession has dried up many jobs that low-wage workers could do.
- And the Drop Inn is changing. Its leadership is working hard to make it more than a warehouse into which the city can stuff its people without homes. It has created a framework of professional social services within the center that assess and work with everyone who seeks shelter there. This includes a series of “step-up dorms” that give residents an incentive to make plans for improving their lives and to work their plans. The trade-off is that the Drop Inn has fewer beds and a growing determination by its professional staff to operate within its physical capacity.

With data from last winter indicating that the Drop Inn would have to turn away as many as 30 people a night this winter, director Pat Clifford called a meeting on a hot August day. Winter is coming, he said. We have to think of something.

There were a lot of church people at the meeting: people from Christ Church Cathedral, the Episcopal diocese, Church of the Redeemer, Nast Trinity Methodist Church and First Lutheran Church. And there were people from City Gospel Mission, the Interfaith Hospitality Network and the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition. Within days, St. Vincent de Paul Society and St. Xavier Church were on board.

By September, a plan had emerged: First Lutheran—just across Washington Park from the Drop Inn Center—would house an overflow shelter in its undercroft. Methodists, Catholics and Episcopalians raised the \$35,000\* that the operation would cost. St. Vincent de Paul agreed to supply administrative oversight and hire the overflow shelter's staff. The Drop Inn agreed to coordinate intake and send people to First Lutheran who had been screened and admitted into the Drop Inn's casework system.

The overflow center opened November 15, just in time for fall weather. By December 15, if the Drop Inn's statistics and the long-range weather forecasts are any guide, the overflow shelter will be a warm blanket wrapping people who otherwise would face extreme discomfort—or worse—night after winter night. The overflow shelter will remain open through mid-March or perhaps a bit later.

Teams of two professional staffers—a man and a woman—will be at the overflow center every night. They would very much appreciate evening volunteer support 8:30 to 10:00 p.m. in getting the shelter set up and morning support 6:00 to 7:30 a.m. in helping serve coffee and packing away cots and bedding. And anyone taking on the weekly laundry would be doing the work of angels.

Volunteers will receive training and will never be on their own—so service by older teens would be appropriate. Training will be provided on a one-on-one basis and can begin at anytime. For more information on volunteering, call Drew Tilow of St. Vincent de Paul Society at 513.562.8841, ext. 211, or e-mail him at [dtilow@svdpcincinnati.org](mailto:dtilow@svdpcincinnati.org).

As Rev. Compton Allyn reminded the cathedral congregation on Stewardship Sunday, the cathedral parish has a long and vigorous history of being out on the streets of the city that surrounds it, meeting the temporal and spiritual needs of the people who live there.

This winter, we are there again.

Mike Phillips  
November 2009

*\*Editor's Note: Cathedral members Tom Kent and Mike Phillips raised \$25,000 of the project's budget—\$5,000 from the cathedral's mission & outreach budget; \$5,000 from the cathedral's Dean's Discretionary Fund; \$5,000 from the diocesan Procter Fund; \$10,000 from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation.*