



April 2004

Brothers and Sisters,

The human tragedy of homelessness in Cleveland is growing and must be effectively addressed. We are the pastors of churches located in Cleveland's Center City. What people call "downtown" we think of as our "backyard", territory that reaches from the River, through the warehouse and gateway neighborhoods, traversing the civic center and theatre districts, extending to the Quadrangle and on the campus of Cleveland State University. Our congregations may be drawn from as far as the distant quarters of this metropolitan area, but our houses of worship, our daily mission field, and our lives are rooted in the heart of the City of Cleveland

Our churches share more than simply common territory; we share common faith, embracing four distinctive Traditions of Christianity. Besides our common scriptures, we share a common conviction that every human being bears the dignity and image of God. Our daily pastoral care makes none of us a stranger to the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, the hopes and despair of the humanity that dwells in and passes through our community.

Among those that our ministries serve, we confess to a preferential love for those who are suffering and poor. Our congregations expend a great deal of prayer, energy, and other resources to bind up the wounded and heal the broken-hearted. The plight of the periodic and the chronically homeless is of particular concern to us. Those who are impoverished, mentally ill, addicted, dual-diagnosed, or un-employable have a right to safe, sanitary, and civilized shelter, basic nutrition, and suitable clothing.

We have repeatedly heard the claim that "no one wants the homeless in their backyard." But our charge is that we must strive to remove the barriers to understanding and compassionate action and to change hearts. The scandal of homelessness calls into question the community's stewardship of resources and social systems on behalf of our homeless neighbors. When the basic needs of the poor are not met or otherwise ignored, a crisis is created – a crisis for the poor personally and a crisis for all of us as a community.

All who live, work, worship, and recreate in the Greater Cleveland area have a responsibility and a duty to care for the homeless in our community. We must be a people who care for one another. We are brothers and sisters from every sector of this society blessed with the gifts, the genius, and the resources to concretely and comprehensively shelter the poorest among us. The only question is whether we have the common will.

Providing a minimum standard of care for human life is not simply an elective or charitable option for a few individuals, religious sects, philanthropists or special interest groups. It is the obligation of every person in a just society. Assuring justice for the homeless begins with our State, County and City elected officials, our economic and industrial leaders, and the heads of our civic and social organizations.

We are encouraged by initiatives to provide adequate and affordable shelter for that segment of Cleveland's population that presently cannot access decent housing. We heartily support the work of the Downtown Men's and Women's Homeless Shelters, the on-going efforts to provide transitional housing throughout the city, permanent housing initiatives such as the 90-unit North Coast Inn project, and the specialized supportive housing collaboration between InterAct of Greater Cleveland and St. Procop Catholic Church. We call upon our public officials to actively promote and provide adequate funding for these initiatives. These programs are to be commended for seeking solutions to a formidable problem, but are only a beginning. Together, serious and sincere partners from among the leadership of this community's political, economic, and civic institutions must make a commitment to take an active role in addressing these housing issues. We pledge our support and involvement in such efforts.

As Jesus reminds us, "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours." As long as one of us in this society is lacking life's necessities, the riches of the Kingdom are diminished for all.

Rev. Kenneth Chalker  
First Church, Cleveland

Rev. Edward Estok,  
The Cathedral of  
St. John the Evangelist

Rev. Tracey Lind,  
Trinity Cathedral

Rev. Dean Myers  
Old Stone Church