



# **HOMELESSNESS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUNDAY AUGUST 9, 2009**

**Over the course of a year, between 2.5 and 3.5 million people will live either on the streets or in an emergency shelter.**

*National Alliance to End Homelessness*

**Families with young children now account for 40% of the nation's homeless population and in the course of a year, more than 1.3 million children are homeless.**

*National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty*

**A renter earning the federal minimum wage must work 109 hours to afford a two-bedroom rental unit at the Fair Market Rent.**

*National Low Income Housing Coalition*

July 2009

Dear Friends,

Thank you for requesting this resource packet for Homelessness and Affordable Housing Sunday. We hope this packet will provide you with helpful resources as you lift up Homelessness and Affordable Housing Sunday set aside by the Presbyterian Church (USA) on August 9, 2009.

We encourage all congregations, specialized ministries and presbyteries to take the opportunity to discuss and to address the issues related to homelessness and affordable housing. During this current economic downturn, our nation continues to experience a major housing crisis as more persons and families are becoming homeless or unable to access safe and affordable housing. It is essential that our congregations, specialized ministries and our middle governing bodies speak up and respond to the suffering of our brothers and sisters, locally and nationally.

In July 2009, the Advisory Council on Social Witness Policy will publish a statement on affordable housing and homelessness approved by the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2008): *From Homelessness to Hope: Constructing Just, Sustainable Communities for All God's People*. *From Homelessness to Hope* reaffirms the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s historical witness that universal access to safe, decent, accessible, affordable, and permanent housing is a measure and a sign of the coming Reign of God.

If you have produced worship and educational materials related to affordable housing and homelessness ministries/issues, we would welcome receiving copies of your resources.

For more information about the resources provided by the Small Church and Community Ministry Office, please contact us or visit our website at [www.pcusa.org/smallchurch](http://www.pcusa.org/smallchurch).

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## Call to Worship

Leader: God demands that we pray on behalf of the oppressed.

**People: How will we pray on their behalf?**

Leader: We will raise our voices to the Lord that God may revive the “cause of the poor.”

**People: How will we ask the Lord to relieve the suffering of the oppressed?**

**All: We shall petition God with our constant prayers to raise the fortunes of the oppressed so they may be acceptable in the eyes of all, as they are in God’s eyes. Amen.**

## Call to Worship: (based on 1 Col 4.11: “... we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless...”)

One: The Lord Almighty has set the path of the Savior’s apostles before us!

**Many: May their strength be our strength in suffering.**

One: Jesus gives the apostles His Word of support ...

**Many: Even when their clothes were tattered....**

One: Even when they had no place to lay their head ....

**Many: Even when Jesus’ word, through them, returns rejection and beating as their reward.**

One: Because God poured the blessings of His Son on the apostles

**Many: We know that God’s blessings will fall as grace itself to lift the shoulders of the poor and downtrodden.**

## Prayer of Invocation

Our Holy God, fill us with wonder at your earth

And fill us with compassion for what society deems the least of these

If we see those whose strangeness is off-putting,

May we overcome our fear to embrace them as Christ!

For those who walk naked down the street

May we offer prayer and clothes and hope

To those languishing in cold, unhappy prison,

May we pray for repentance and forgiveness.

As we see those hungry or thirsty on the street

May our response be not rejection but as they were the king!

Open us to see clearly how we can finally live out the wonder of your creation earth

In our relationship with those most unlike us, and yet

Most like You in the margins of life

## Prayer of Confession

God, our help in every age, help us now. We admit that we are afraid to practice the hospitality and welcome you expect of us. When someone in need approaches, we shrink away. Is it fear? Is it guilt? Or is it that all of a sudden our own neediness is awakened? Help us to cultivate that place inside each of us where we remember that our home is with You – a home that is warm, where things always work out in the end, and where love has the final word. We want to share your grace with others. Help us to be the bearers of your grace in every act of care, in every act of welcome. Amen.

## Responsive Reading

Leader: O Lord, by whose cross all enmity is brought to an end,

**People:** Break down the walls that separate us.

Leader: Help us understand how to tear down the former things.

**People:** Show us how to bring renewal to your world.

Leader: Awaken in us the passion to dream.

**People:** Guide us as we take small steps toward great visions.

Leader: We ask that you give us wisdom and strength,

**People:** Patience and compassion.

Leader: Lord, who can make all things new, open our eyes.

**People:** Let us see in our own communities and around the globe those who are without shelter.

Leader: Today we lift up to you those who yearn for a simple, decent and affordable place to call home.

**People:** Give us courage to respond.

Leader: As we give of ourselves, let us be grateful for those who give to us.

**People:** By the power of your Spirit, make us one. Amen.

## Litany for Shelter

Leader: We pray this day, O Lord, for all people who do not have adequate shelter in which to live and raise their families, and for those who have no shelter at all.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: We prayer for families who living space is so small that their children will never know the meaning of privacy.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: We pray for all those who are sick because their house are infested or toxic, and the water comes through the roof every time it rains.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: We pray for all people whose living conditions are more than a burden than a pleasure, causing them to lose their dignity and their hope.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: We pray for all those people who use much of their energy and resources patching their dwelling, only to patch it again only to find that the patches have really solved nothing.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: We pray O Lord that those of us in this congregation who live in safe, secure and comfortable shelter will see our homes with humble acceptance as treasures entrusted to us for use in your work.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: Move us, stir us, O Lord, to action on behalf of all people in our world who desperately need decent housing and cannot make it on their own.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: Make us sensitive to the world around us. Give us hearing that really hears, sight that really sees, insight that really knows, and hearts that are restless until all of God's people can live in safe and adequate shelter.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: Help us to see those who are poorly housed, not as objects of our pity, but as brothers and sisters who stand at the foot of the cross and at the doorstep of the Church with real and pressing needs.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: Teach us to be generous, O Lord – generous with our time and talents, generous with our money, generous with our creativity, generous with our lives.

**People: Hear our prayer, O Lord!**

Leader: Grant, O Lord, that we may learn to serve you by working with those who are in need of decent shelter. May the work we do be an expression of our faith and a witness to the love you have for all people.

**ALL: Hear our prayer, O Lord, and give us the courage to act!**

## Scripture/Sermon Ideas

Social and economic justice is clear and predominant biblical themes. Christian and Jewish texts remind us that those in poverty have often been made poor through oppression, greed and broken relationships with the human family. Here are a few of the scripture texts that can be read or used for your sermon.

Genesis 15: 13-16 - God promised to end homelessness for Israel and give them a new home.

Exodus 2:23-25 - God hears the cry of the destitute homeless.

Exodus 3: 1-12 (and other excerpts from chapters 1, 2 and 3) -- God hears, sees and knows human suffering, especially that caused by economic exploitation. God's will is for slavery and oppression to end and for Creation's gifts to be shared by all.

Leviticus 19:9-18 (or Deut. 24:10-21) -- In grateful response to the God who frees from slavery and oppression, the community sets rules to provide for the needs of the lowest wage workers, widows, orphans and aliens.

Isaiah 1:17 -- Be action people; the hands and feet and voice of Jesus Christ in this place. We are called to make things right for people in need.

Isaiah 58: 6-12 -- The Lord promises favor on those who care for others, who build up what has been torn down, who do His work.

Isaiah 65: 17-25 -- In God's realm, work brings life's necessities in ample supply, and our children and elders dwell in health and security.

Jeremiah 29:1-9 -- As people exiled from our true home, we are to seek the welfare of the city within which we find ourselves.

Amos 5:21-25 -- Our worship offends God if not accompanied by righteousness and justice within society.

Micah 6:6-8 -- Ending homelessness is what God requires us to do.

Mathew 25 :31-46 -- Our love of Christ is demonstrated through our regard for "the least of these," those despised and forsaken in our communities.

Acts 2:43-47 and 4:32-35 -- The Pentecostal blessing of the Holy Spirit leads to sharing by all so that none experience scarcity.

Ephesians 2:11-22 -- Christ is our peace, breaking down the walls that divide us and building one united household in God.

James 2: 14-26 -- Ending poverty and homelessness takes action and cannot be done by confession alone.

## **Individual, Congregational and Community Actions**

### **Individual**

1. Read everything you can about homelessness and housing issues.
2. Find about your community's amount and quality of affordable housing and extremely low-income housing. What are neighboring cities doing? More? Less?
3. Volunteer for your city's Housing or Planning Commission where housing decisions are made.
4. Attend public discussions about housing, zoning, and possible funding sources.
5. Network with people who know about building affordable housing.

### **Congregational**

1. Join a faith-based community organizing group to gather support for building low-income housing, e.g., [www.piconetwork.org](http://www.piconetwork.org).
2. Educate the community about possibilities: have a speaker or speaker series, show films ("Holding Ground: the rebirth of Dudley Street" is one (Newday Films: [www.newday.com](http://www.newday.com)); excite people about housing issues.
3. Research land availability, funding sources (there are many non-profit housing developers who know how to put funding together for housing projects... e.g. Charities Housing, [www.charitieshousing.org](http://www.charitieshousing.org)), legality of building housing.
4. Participate with local *Habitat for Humanity* house-building and building-rehab projects.
5. Become an active member of a low-income housing development organization in your community. Check out the National Alliance of Community Economic Development Association to identify a low-income housing development organization in your community – [www.naceda.org](http://www.naceda.org).
6. Provide funding or a no/low interest loan to support a non-profit housing development organization to create or build affordable housing.
7. Acquire, rehab, and sell/rent an affordable housing unit, e.g., transitional housing, shelter for homeless.

### **Community**

1. Create a "Community Care" consortium with other churches, community, and neighborhood groups and then lobby, raise money for, and raise awareness about the need for low-income housing in your community.
2. Join with other congregations and/or neighborhood organizations to form a non-profit housing development corporation.
3. Research Federal "Community Development Block Grant" (CDBG) funding in your community (call your Housing Authority or City Housing office.) CDBG funds can be used to build low-income housing (or repair or renovate existing housing).

## Links to more information on Affordable Housing and Ending Homelessness

### Affordable Housing

Housing and Urban Development (HUD): [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)

Affordable Housing Online, commonly asked questions about: [www.affordablehousingonline.com](http://www.affordablehousingonline.com)

Mercy Housing: [www.mercyhousing.org](http://www.mercyhousing.org)

Justice Talking on Low Income Housing: [www.justicetalking.org](http://www.justicetalking.org)

National Low Income Housing Coalition: [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org)

Low Income Housing Institute: [www.lihi.org](http://www.lihi.org)

Jubilee Housing, Washington D.C.: [www.jubileehousing.org](http://www.jubileehousing.org)

Effects of Low-Income housing on neighboring communities: [www.realtor.org](http://www.realtor.org)

Saving Affordable Housing; What Communities Can Do: [www.nhi.org/online/issues/sf90.html](http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/sf90.html)

Affordable Housing Institute: [www.affordablehousinginstitute.org](http://www.affordablehousinginstitute.org)

The Campaign for Affordable Housing: [www.tcuh.org](http://www.tcuh.org)

### Ending Homelessness

Jean Kim has spent her life fighting homelessness and teaching others: <http://jeankimhome.com>

National Alliance to End Homelessness: [www.naeh.org](http://www.naeh.org)

The National Coalition for the Homeless : [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)

Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness: [www.pnteh.org](http://www.pnteh.org)

The Partnership To End Chronic Homelessness: [www.endlongtermhomelessness.org](http://www.endlongtermhomelessness.org)

Coalition to End Homelessness: [www.help4homeless.org](http://www.help4homeless.org)

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty: [www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org)

Urban Institute study: What will it take to end homelessness? [www.urban.org/publications/310305.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/310305.html)

Every state and many cities have ongoing efforts to reduce or end homelessness... here are just a few:

- ▶ Interfaith Assembly for Homelessness and Housing: [www.iahh.org](http://www.iahh.org)
- ▶ Providence House (Shreveport, LA): [www.theprovidencehouse.com](http://www.theprovidencehouse.com)
- ▶ Interfaith Council for the Homeless (Chicago): [www.ichchicago.org](http://www.ichchicago.org)
- ▶ InnVision, the Way Home (SF Bay Area, CA): [www.innvision.org](http://www.innvision.org)

### Advocacy

- National Alliance to End Homelessness– Tips on Advocacy: [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)
- Order: “How to Be an Effective Advocate...Let your Voices Be Heard” PC USA, Washington Office; PDS #7282206001 from the Presbyterian Distribution Service
- Order: “Speaking Truth to Power-- The Washington Office”; PDS #7294201002
- Sign up for the Washington Office Action e-serve newsletter on information and action alerts: <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/mlm/signup/>

### The Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness ([www.pnteh.org](http://www.pnteh.org))

**Our Mission:** to affirm, challenge, educate and empower local churches, and the Church as a whole, in the struggle to end homelessness.

**Our Vision:** Our vision is for each Presbyterian congregation and Presbytery to embrace a comprehensive approach to ending homelessness.

[The worship resources in this packet have been produced by the National Council of Churches, Habitat for Humanity, A Home for All God’s People, the Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness, and the North Carolina Council of Churches]

## Finding Vision for the Future by Discovering the Past

*PC (USA) Church first established in 1846 to be demolished for Affordable Housing for Seniors*

By Paul Seebeck, Associate for Mission Communications

QUEENS, Ny. – (April 17, 2009) Pastor Don Olinger of the Presbyterian Church of Astoria in Queens wears his favorite baseball cap religiously these days. A friend found it at a garage sale, and thought it would be perfect for Olinger when he saw these words: *“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”* For Olinger, who is legally blind and uses a cane to get around, it is a sacred reminder of what he has experienced. “All things work together for good,” he says, “for those who love God” (Romans 8:28). You can hear the sense of wonder in his voice even though his congregation was down to 25-members at one point.

The Presbyterian Church of Astoria that Olinger has served for fifteen years is about to be demolished. All of the stained glass windows on this grey stone building have been removed. The gas has been turned off. Temporary windows keep the building secure while the congregation waits for the month long demolition process to begin. In existence since 1846, the church began construction in this place and space in 1922. Nearly a century later, building maintenance expenses were getting to be too much for the church. They needed updated wiring, new heating and plumbing systems, and they were trying to cope with rising utility costs. In 2002 the church’s session empowered Olinger to begin to explore options for their future. “All of this started off simply with the idea, ‘what should we do?’” says Olinger. “To save the building would’ve cost us anywhere from \$1-3M. Our session said, ‘pastor go find out what we should do.’”

Olinger began talking with a city council representative and community board, asking them what they would like to see happen to the church. Out of those conversations Olinger went back to the church seeking permission to put together a feasibility study to determine if it might be possible to do some sort of affordable housing on their property.

The congregation’s response was clear, “they didn’t want to lose this place,” he says, “they wanted to serve the community here.” But at the time lucrative NY commercial real estate developers kept saying “there wasn’t an ‘economy of scale’ to make it worth their while to develop part of the property,” says Olinger. “They wanted all of our space. They wanted us to take the money and get out of the way.”

That’s when Olinger found a “crazy zoning law” that said the church could build a larger facility if it was a “senior domiciliary.” Even the zoning board wasn’t quite sure what that meant. But research that went back to the 1920’s and 30’s told a story of what life was like for senior citizens during these boom and bust years. Before social security there were a lot of indigent seniors with no pensions and no way to support themselves. Once Olinger understood that this “crazy law” written during the Great Depression, could’ve just as easily have been written for today –senior domiciliary is the 1920’s word for senior affordable housing – he had a moment of understanding. Olinger remembered what the community planning board had told him in that initial exploratory meeting. Affordable senior housing is what the neighborhood and NY City most desperately needed. The board said it took most seniors three years to find affordable housing.

Olinger found out the Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Corporation (HANAC) was interested in partnering with a developer that might have interest in affordable housing for seniors. Then “out of the blue” the Enterprise Foundation called. “Don if you’re still looking to develop your property, we have a group here that is interested in doing an affordable housing for seniors.” “God just steered everything in this direction,” says Olinger. “There were all these serendipitous moments.”

Olinger could literally see that God’s spirit had been at work through the history of time and space from one economic boom and bust time to another. He had a sense that all things in the church’s time and space were connected, as if he was discovering the future by re-engaging the church’s past.

He went back to the congregation and to Presbytery of New York City and said, “Listen we have a sanctuary that seats 500 people and there are only about 50 of us. This isn’t good stewardship. God has put us here for reason.” The unfortunate truth is – at this moment – conflict had broken out in the congregation. Church leadership was very interesting in pursuing affordable housing for seniors, but anonymous letters attacking Olinger began to appear. They were sent on to Presbytery. Nothing ever came of the attackers charges. They were all dismissed by a Presbytery Judiciary Council.

“Presbyteries are overwhelmed by all these churches that just want to survive,” says Olinger. “But Jesus said ‘those who want to save their life will lose it, those who lose their life for the sake of the gospel will save it (Mark 8:35).’ The majority of us decided we would take that quite literally.” The decision to replace the church with housing for senior adults though was difficult for the congregation. The final vote was 17-13 in favor of building 94-apartments for 100 senior adults. Community board members believe more than 4,000 people will apply to live

The Executive Presbyter of NY City is the Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rodgers. She acknowledges there was “creative tension” within the congregation and Presbytery as this senior affordable housing project was put together. “It is a remarkable story,” she says, “there were real small congregations with very big economic possibilities. They are usually larger than any one church can fathom or manage. The scope, the breadth, the depth, the mammoth of possibilities makes them afraid.” According to Meadows-Rodgers developers were “ringing doorbells” saying “I want your building I’ll give you \$40M for it.” The current economic crisis she says “has been very helpful for all of us. It was very easy in that climate for churches and Presbyteries to see gold. Astoria kept its mission at the front. It’s not always easy to do.” While the Presbytery tries to partner with its small churches, she says that “inevitably it is the tenacity of the small church and its pastor, its faithfulness and sense of hope that keeps things moving and gets them done.”

The Presbyterian Church of Astoria is being paid \$4.25M for their property – part of this expense is being paid for out of HUD tax credit. In 15-years the deed for the property reverts back to the church. At that point the housing project will in all likelihood be managed by HANAC. In 40-years the Church will have control of 94-units of housing that can be for anybody. The HUD enforcement mortgage that demands it be used for senior will be done. Once the project is built the church will have a 5,000 square foot condominium in the senior affordable housing project that will be used for office space and worship. It will cost them about \$1.5M to create and outfit this multi-purpose space that will become their sanctuary. “All churches don’t have to go this model,” says Olinger, “but I believe we have to be good stewards. Zoning and community defined the best mission for our church.”

The congregation at The Presbyterian Church of Astoria, what’s left of it, is gradually beginning to move forward. They lost half of their members because of the conflict. Already they are back up to forty on Sunday morning. Worshippers who come from their neighborhood are from seven different countries: Ghana, Trinidad, Philippines, Japan, Indian, Portugal and Italy, which doesn’t surprise Olinger since the neighborhood has always served immigrants. They are worshipping in what was an old doctor’s office and then an office for a non-profit that went bankrupt. It is near the site where their church will be demolished. Computer equipment was left behind. The church is trying to resurrect the equipment so that it can offer computer skills so that folks can get better jobs. “God is providing us with guidance and resources,” says Olinger, “through all of what has happened for this church – in the conflict, in everything – as a result we are defining what we’re about, and who we’re going to be.”

Recently a young woman the church hadn’t seen in over a year came to worship in this temporary space and place. She went over to talk to Pastor Olinger saying that she was “sorry to be late” but that she had gone over to the other building. “Why is it all boarded up?” she wanted to know, with tears in her eyes. Olinger told her that it was being demolished so that 94-units of affordable housing for seniors could be built.

Now the woman began to cry. “At that point I told her look ‘we’re all going to miss the building.’” Olinger barely got the words out because the woman was interrupting him. “That’s not why I’m crying,” she said. “I’m crying because at last a church is doing it right. You’re serving the community, you’re getting it right.”