

First and Center

Pastor's Blog

September 25, 2019

Last night, I needed to meet some folk at the Meeting House at 7pm. When I got there a few minutes before, there were already 5 or 6 people laying down, preparing to spend the night on the portico of the Meeting House. When I left about 45 minutes later, more had gathered. On a typical night, we have about ten people who sleep on that portico. We have spoken to them about trash and other waste, as Tom was spending hours cleaning up after them daily, and we have said that we will not ask the police to chase them away, but they need to clean up. To a lesser or greater extent, they are complying.



This is an explosion in the numbers of people from what we have seen in the past. Hartford is down one shelter for at least six months or more, as Immacare is being renovated. That means the whole winter, and we lose seventy beds for men. Logan reports that he is seeing more women, including pregnant and senior women, with nowhere to sleep and no shelter beds for them. For some reason, and the Health Department does not know why, Hartford's homeless population has swelled in the month of September. This in a "booming" economy. This, also, in the midst of an addiction epidemic to opioids and other drugs.

We are collecting winter coats and hats, etc., which helps. We offer a Sunday evening meal that gets folk inside for a few hours, which helps (but we need MANY MORE members of Center to volunteer or this ministry may not continue after Logan leaves January 15). The City will provide a "warming center" where people can spend the night sitting on chairs, but that center was hardly big enough last year and the city is planning on using the same space this year.

What can we do? If you live in Hartford, contact the Mayor's Office to ask that the City open a second warming center or a temporary shelter to replace Immacare. If you live in the suburbs, you can also help. Most suburbs have few services, no shelters, or warming centers, so people who find themselves homeless in your town make their way to Hartford -- a city which is already stretched financially now pays for suburban folk which their own towns do not serve. What if you all petitioned your town to either open a shelter or contribute money to the City of Hartford to support homeless services?

Finally, or actually first, please add our overnight guests to your prayers. Their stories are as varied as yours are. Their lives equally as important. Pray for their struggles, for the city and non-profit agencies who seek to help them, and for us as a church as we discern our role in serving those in need.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister