



Building the blessed city together

ending
chronic
homelessness

& establishing a sound housing policy in NYC

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Religious and Community Leaders Build Policy Planks to End Homelessness

Religious leaders, community activists, and elected officials from throughout New York City joined together today to build an eight-foot high house at City Hall Park that was constructed with “policy planks” detailing ways that government can take the lead in working with nonprofit groups and businesses to end chronic homelessness in the City.

Sponsored by the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, the symbolic home-building kicked-off the 20th anniversary overnight vigil at City Hall park to end chronic homelessness and build a “blessed city.”

“Eliminating chronic homelessness in NYC – ensuring that no one is homeless except for a short period as a result of an emergency – is within our grasp,” said Marc Greenberg, Executive Director of the Assembly. “Through an integrated effort that produces affordable housing, prevents homelessness, respects the rights of homeless people, provides adequate emergency and support services, creates employment, and provides adequate income for those who cannot work, the faith community, the nonprofit sector, private developers, concerned New Yorkers, and government at all levels can, together, build a City that is truly blessed.” The four public policy planks used to build the house were:

1) Permanent Housing Production - Create new affordable housing units; maximize incentives for housing developers; create more supportive housing units for formerly homeless families; and create national and local housing trust funds.

2) Homelessness Prevention - Maintain existing housing stock; establish an early warning homelessness prevention system; provide legal assistance to all people with housing problems; increase funding and access to Emergency Cash Assistance and Emergency Grants to families facing a housing crisis; and provide housing options for people leaving for institutions and foster care.

3) Human Rights, Emergency and Support Services - Respect the rights and dignity of homeless people; maintain the right to shelter and remove barriers to accessing that right; adequately fund services for homeless people; and empower staff at shelter access points to provide full services.

4) Employment and Income Support - Raise the federal and state minimum wages and expand the city living wage law; create and train workers for living wage jobs; insure appropriate compensation and education and training for public assistance recipients; maximize access to anti-poverty benefits such as food

stamps; increase rent subsidies and expand availability of rental assistance; and provide adequate funding for section 8 and other federal rental assistance programs.

“To stem the rising tide of people turning to the shelter system, it is absolutely vital that we maintain our current housing stock, preserve existing subsidized and rent regulated housing and ensure community-based legal assistance and counseling to those at-risk of homelessness,” said Larry Wood, of Goddard Riverside Community Center, as he placed the first policy plank onto the homelessness prevention wall of the house.

Said Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, said as he placed the final policy plank on the house: “Given that the number of New Yorkers forced to use soup kitchens and food pantries and shelters is at its highest level in decades, the City should do more to utilize every penny in federal anti-poverty benefits such as food stamps. These benefits are vital in helping people stay in their homes, as well as enabling people who are already homeless to get back on their feet.”

Participants in the event included: Reverend Dr. James A. Forbes, Senior Minister of the Riverside Church; Reverend John E. Hiemstra, Executive Director, Council of Churches of the City Of New York; Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, President, New York Board of Rabbis; Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Director, NY Catholic Charities, Bishop Stephen Bouman, Evangelical Lutheran In America Metro NY Synod; Bishop E. Don Taylor, Episcopal Diocese of New York; Reverend Skip L’Heureux, Executive Director, Queens Federation of Churches; Reverend James Kowalski, Dean, Cathedral of St. John The Divine; Rabbi Rolando Matalon, Congregation B’Nai Jeshurun, Father Mark Hallinan SJ, Jesuits, NY Province; Joel Berg, Executive Director, New York City Coalition Against Hunger; Kevin Sullivan, Director of Advocacy, Habitat for Humanity NYC; Lauren Bholai-Pareti, Executive Director, Council on Homeless Policies and Services; Larry Wood, Chairman, City Wide Task Force on Housing Court; Marc Greenberg, Executive Director, Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing; City Council Member Gail Brewer; City Council Member David Yassky and The Reverend Arabella Meadows-Rogers, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of New York City.

Said Mark Hallinan, S.J., of the Jesuits of NY Province: "In the Christian tradition, we believe that shelter is a right to be accorded all persons and in a nation as wealthy as our own we certainly have no good reason to see this right denied to far too many. Through the concerted efforts of women and men of good will, we can move our policy makers to adopt those simple and sensible policies through which the homeless will be housed and those whose housing is now tenuous will be made secure."

The vigil also included an Interfaith Convocation at St. Paul’s Chapel and breakfast the next day at City hall Park with elected officials

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