

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CATHOLIC CHURCH
HOMELESS PARK NEWS

WINTER 2008-9

ISSUE 1

The Park

The park has been owned by our church since 2000 and we have kept it open to anyone who needs rest. When the city plaza was closed at dusk, the homeless there came to the park and as time passed, park conditions worsened. Our church formed a Park Working Group (PWG) in February 2008 to address and improve the park's conditions and to communicate with the city's Division of Homeless Services as they work to move individuals into housing.

The PWG has cleaned the park four times and will institute monthly cleanings starting December 2008. A park manager has been hired to check on the residents, sweep the park regularly, and notify the PWG of needs.

The Park Residents

The PWG conducts a census at least monthly. Since May, there have been over 70 people who have slept at least one night in the park. While there are some people who report being in the park for over five years, the reality is that they drift in and out of the park. Our census form collects minimal information and ensures that the individual knows of services available at our church (Friday meal, men's clothing, and AA meetings) and in the area (Our Daily Bread, among others). We interact through the city with case managers from contracted agencies and with VA case managers to link residents with services.

Updates

Ms. Emily (the grandmother written up in the Sun) received housing through Our Daily Bread in Basilica Place.

Mr. Bill and Mr. Larry received housing through the city's Housing First program.

Mr. Eartle received housing at Perry Point through the VA.

A few others are in the last phases of paperwork and are close to housing.

Our Generous Donors

Our biggest challenge was identifying all the people who donated food and clothing to the park. The scope of this generosity was incredible but food was in excess of what could be eaten and, when kept in the park, caused problems with rats. Almost all donations arrived on the weekends. With little storage, clothing often got ruined in the rain and mud. Both food and clothing were hoarded and bartered for alcohol or drugs. We wanted to ensure that people got the food they needed when they needed it but we also had to address some of the problems caused by the excess. We have posted a sign to restrict donations and have worked with specific donor organizations to schedule meals.

Our special thanks go to:

Monday Evenings:	Loyola University Students in the park
Tuesday Evenings:	Loyola University Students in the park
Wednesday Evenings:	Salvation Army Mobile Food Van on Front St
Thursday Evenings:	Salvation Army Mobile Food Van on Front St
Friday Evenings:	Our Lady of Fields Meal Program in Church Hall feeding over 250 people per week
Saturday Evenings:	New Psalmist Baptist Church (2 and 4) Bridgeway Community Church Columbia (1)

Mid-day meals are available at Our Daily Bread.

EPIC Church, Canton for continuing funding of the Port-a-Pot in the park and raising \$4,500 toward park needs. We will be adding benches for folks currently on the ground with this money.

StreetLite Ministry for arranging flu shots for park residents on November 9 and painting the park benches.

Our deep gratitude to these generous people!

Ongoing and new needs:

Residents need toiletries including lotion in cold weather.

Gloves, hats, socks, and mufflers/scarves can always be used. [Residents can obtain free coats and clothing from St Vincent de Paul Society on the first Friday of the month in our Church Hall with their hot meal and at other places any week; this information is posted in the park.]

Once wet, blankets rarely can be re-used. New ones are needed.

When the weather warms, a second port-a-pot will be needed (a unit is designed for 10 men for a 40 hr work week. In warmer weather our unit

is servicing over 80 people 24/7). One unit with twice weekly servicing costs \$175 per month.

Please, NO tents, mattresses, or very large tarps. This is an agreement we have with the city.

Information? Contact: Audrey Rogers at jonaud2@comcast.net or 410-719-6712