

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CATHOLIC CHURCH
HOMELESS PARK NEWS

SPRING 2009

ISSUE 2

The Park and the Homeless There

The park has been owned by our church since 2000 and we have kept it open to anyone who needs rest. Our Park Working Group (PWG) conducts a monthly census and in the last nine months, we have interviewed over 105 people who have slept at least one night in the park.

The original intention was to keep the park open to those without a place to sleep but to remain park space during the day. Over time, people who are averse to using the city shelter have started to camp in the park, storing excessive belongings/food and living in unhealthy circumstances. These individuals have little to no incentive to better their circumstances because they are enabled by the flood of donations. This donation flood also draws crowds from the city shelter and nearby neighborhood who add to the disorder in the park.

Our biggest challenge has been to strike a balance between providing for the basic needs of the homeless on our doorstep given our limited resources -and- ensuring that they have the incentive to link to available services.

Baltimore City's Street to Home Project

During 2008, Baltimore City's Division of Homeless Services (BHS) dedicated 20 housing vouchers to the homeless park population and worked hard to successfully place 20 individuals from the park. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints and the city's conclusion that the park is not an acceptable venue for processing housing applicants, the program will not continue in 2009. All housing placements will be processed at the city shelter. BHS will continue outreach to the park to encourage people to use the shelter and apply for housing.

Conditions in the Park

Our church volunteers have been cleaning the park monthly since December. However, our park manager has been ill and is currently hospitalized for rehabilitation.

Our biggest challenge this past winter has been the high volume of people donating food and clothing to the park far in excess of what can

be used. Because so many routinely ignored our sign restricting donations, we wrote an Opinion Piece for the Sun Papers. Our plan to divert clothing donations to St Vincent de Paul Society who would then size them and make them systematically available to those who need them, including the park population, in the church hall is under reevaluation. Too often, the park population intercepts donations, picks through them, and leaves them lying on the ground where rain and mud ruin them. Some clothes then make their way into the collection bin where they ruin the good clothes. The bin may have to be removed if we cannot find a solution to this problem.

Our continued special thanks go to our partners who serve suppers:

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 where services can also be accessed.

Our special thanks go to

EPIC Church, Canton for continuing to fund the Port-a-Pot in the park and recruiting volunteers from Michigan to help install five new benches in the park on March 8. The benches were purchased through a generous donation from Epic Church.

Our deep gratitude to these generous people!

Ongoing and new needs:

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.

Also, do not ever provide the park residents with grills, incinerators, charcoal, or wood. Open fires are illegal in Baltimore City and we have been warned that the next occurrence will result in substantial fines.

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