



## Good Faith Communities Coalition

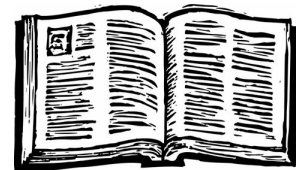
Taking action on homelessness and affordable housing with and for the poor in the District of Columbia

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October 30, 2015

### Fall Meeting: Creating the community we want to live in...

**Temple Micah, 2829 Wisconsin Ave. NW.  
Sunday, November 8, 2015. 2 - 4 PM.**



- **Jay Melder, Chief of Staff to the Director of the District Department of Human Services, will present an overview of *Homeward DC*, a progressive plan that the city projects will make homelessness in the District a rare, brief and non-recurring experience by 2020. What lies ahead as implementation engages the entire community?**
- **Msgr. John Enzler, President and CEO of Catholic Charities DC, will speak about the challenges faced by individuals who are homeless and living on DC streets. Among many services for the poor and vulnerable, Catholic Charities runs two low barrier homeless shelters for men: 801 East Men's Shelter and NY Ave. Men's Shelter.**

Questions/answers and discussion will follow the presentations.

**Become informed! Become Active! Make a difference!**

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**Shelter Census on October 25, 2015: 595 families with 1252 children in shelter and transitional housing + 1160 individuals in low barrier shelters.**

### Private bathrooms in shelters? Social Justice issue?

**The District is about to build and/or renovate buildings for 6 family shelters.** Each will house 40 families. The small shelters will replace DC General in the city's family shelter system. **The shelters will be in different wards throughout the city.** The location of the shelters has not been announced. Draft floor designs have been made public. They show single rooms for families - with multiple shared bathrooms on each floor. No food preparation capacity in rooms is available.

**Shelter is emergency housing.** The District's goal is to move families to permanent housing within 60 days. At present the stay in shelter is 9 months+. The federal standard is 30 days. Given the affordable housing shortage in the city, many say it may be 5 years before the 60 day goal can be approached.

**The Council votes November 3 on changes to current law that requires apartment style units for families in shelter** - separate sleeping rooms for adults and children, private bathrooms and cooking facilities within the unit. The proposed changes would **allow single room placement** with no private bathrooms except for those with special needs and with no cooking or food storage within the unit.

**The debate over the changes, mostly among the advocacy community, their clients and the city administration, has been intense:**

- **Advocates:** families recovering from the trauma of homelessness, often driven by domestic violence, need to heal their mental and physical brokenness before they can take hold of their lives and become self-sufficient. **Privacy, trust and safety are prerequisites to healing. If not apartments, at least private bathrooms must be provided.**
- **Families in shelter:** "It is scary living in the facility where a lot of residents are on edge and constantly in conflict with each other. Fighting over bathroom space was common - a lot of residents preferred to use the family restroom but there were only limited family restrooms. This preference was due to safety issues - **no one wants their children using rest rooms with strangers.**"
- **Administration: Single room per family with adequate common space is sufficient in temporary shelter.** A well run shelter can provide the safety required. Amble shared bathrooms will be provided on each floor. Private bathrooms increase the cost and decrease the number of units that can be provided in each building. **The city can't afford the increased cost over its current investment to provide private bathrooms.** Mayor Bowser: "Once we have these neighborhood facilities in place, we can close DC General once and for all."

By the time you read this, the Council will probably have made its decision on space and private bathrooms. *Homeward DC*, DC's plan to address homelessness, is well thought out - aggressive goals, metrics and investment. **Between the plan and implementation, however, many decisions among alternative approaches that will affect the desired outcome will be made.** This month the discussion was private bathrooms, but it will certainly not be the last.

**Taking steps to help people heal and supporting them in the journey is a long accepted role of all faith communities. In this space between plan and implementation what is the role of the faith community seeking justice? How can we live that role with and for those who are homeless and marginalized?**

And we pray.....

**Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten. Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.**

**BE INFORMED, BE ACTIVE, MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**



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OUR EMAILS**



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