



Good Faith at Five Years - Commentary

After several years within the social justice committee of Holy Trinity Catholic Church and as a program in a non-profit, Good Faith became an independent interfaith organization in 2013 working with the faith and advocacy communities and with our neighbors who are poor and often homeless. Good Faith's long-term focus has been system change so that the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors for affordable housing and, too often, for homeless services are addressed in a manner that leads to successful and sustainable outcomes. The most vulnerable are those households in the 0 – 30% AMI (area median income): no more than \$32,700 annual income for a household of four.

Based on our common Biblical roots and our moral perspective, Good Faith educates about poverty in the city and about specific issues related to homelessness and affordable housing. This focus is based on the belief that affordable and sustainable housing is fundamental to family and individual stability. With this stability comes the capacity to change, normalize relationships and move forward in productive ways that benefit the individuals, their families and the community.

Good Faith examines and questions government policies and programs. Do we have the right programs to address the needs? Are the programs implemented effectively to achieve outcomes that will benefit the poor and marginalized? Is public funding, the means that society uses to aggregate resources to meet public needs, adequate? Good Faith supports workable solutions that deliver promised outcomes and protect client's rights. And asks "Why" when solutions and outcomes for the poor and marginalized don't measure up.

Good Faith has successfully brought the voice of the faith community to the table as major accomplishments have been achieved over the past several years: an annual investment of \$100M in affordable housing through the Housing Production Trust Fund; permanent supportive housing for many veterans and chronically homeless adults, many of whom have lived on the street for years; short term family housing in all District wards to replace an outdated shelter system; and the creation of a true safety net for families through the restructuring of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program.

Sizable challenges remain, particularly for those, often homeless or inadequately housed, in the 0-30% AMI income cluster. The city defines its legal obligations to the homeless as a *Crisis Response System* operating within a *Right to Shelter* legal mandate. Families who are homeless and can prove they are residents of the city and individuals with no safe place to spend the night are guaranteed shelter during hypothermia season, either in family shelter, youth shelter or low-barrier shelter for single adults. Low barrier shelters are open year-round; shelter intake

and placement of families and youth in shelter has been expanded to a year-round program to meet needs as they occur.

The cost of the Crisis Response System and all of the ancillary services for the poor and vulnerable that the city provides in its human service sector is substantial, close to one-third of the city's \$11B budget. Housing assistance with minimal services for a family of four can cost \$20,000 a year and there are almost 40,000 households on the wait list. Permanent Supportive Housing, housing supplemented by intensive support services for those with mental or physical disabilities, can cost nearly \$30,000 a year for families.

The *Right to Shelter* mandate does not include a legal right to housing assistance. However, if some housing assistance, often longer term, is not provided to most families living in the 0-30% income cluster, the homeless cycle will repeat itself and generational poverty becomes a reality. For those in the low-income cluster, the cost of housing is too high, the hourly wage is too low to ensure market-rate housing for someone working 40 hours a week and the job market favors highly educated and skilled workers.

Though Washington DC is a prosperous city, there are many worthy demands for resources - to support education, to maintain the attractiveness of the city to potential residents, and to support economic development, the engine that drives prosperity. The challenge for the city is to meet these needs while helping its most vulnerable residents to become as self-sufficient and self-reliant as possible. There are no quick solutions for those living in deep poverty. Time is measured in years, not in months.

Good Faith works with our partners to see that the political will to address these long-term challenges does not waiver, nor are the rights of the poor and vulnerable compromised in our haste to check the "no more poverty" box on our political score card. There is no checkoff box and we must be vigilant:

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