

**Remarks to the media regarding
St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter**

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As Catholics, we are called to give food and shelter to those in need. Jesus is our example of this ministry. He showed a radical hospitality to the sick, to the hungry as well as to those considered untouchable. We, as Catholics, cannot shirk from this Gospel imperative.

Since opening its doors on November 6, 2007, the staff and volunteers at the St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter have demonstrated radical hospitality. About 231 homeless brothers and sisters have been served. While anticipating approximately 25 guests per night we have averaged 38.

In the last four months, we have worked diligently to provide a safe place for the homeless. We have collaborated with other social service agencies to provide broader care to individuals coming to the shelter. We have worked with city government in listening to their concerns and advice and trying to comply with their wishes while still fulfilling the essence of our homeless ministry. I believe that we have a strong safety program established with the Green Bay Police Department. We have opened the dialogue with the neighborhood to listen to their concerns and make as many adjustments to our shelter operations as possible. And we have received tremendous support from a broad cross-section of the community whose members have volunteered their time and resources to make the shelter a success.

As we look at today's homeless situation in Brown County and look to the winter of 2008/2009, we see two fundamental issues for our community:

- First, we still do not have a viable plan within our community for the shelter and safety of homeless people who do not qualify for service at other shelters. While we contacted churches and communities outside of the city limits of Green Bay as requested by the City Council, none of the contacts responded with a facility to serve as a temporary emergency shelter.
- Secondly, even if a portion of our guests were eligible to stay at other shelters, there is not sufficient capacity. The number of homeless looking for shelter has increased dramatically from last winter to this winter. In speaking with other agencies providing shelter to the homeless, we found that there are no plans to expand facilities or programs that could accommodate the people using St. John's shelter.

As a result, St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter will open again on November 1, 2008. Assuming we can overcome certain financial challenges, our approach will be the following:

1. The shelter will operate primarily as an overnight emergency shelter to provide a secure and safe place for the homeless during winter months. While this is a core ministry of the Catholic Church, we will continue to work with other social service agencies to provide resources for our guests to be able to segue to more permanent shelter accommodations. We will work in good faith with the city government to find common ground whereby this shelter can operate with the support of the people of Green Bay and the City Council. We will continue to work closely with the Green Bay Police Department on a robust safety plan. Finally, we will continue our open dialogue with neighbors to hear their suggestions and make modifications as needed.
2. We will open the shelter earlier than 6:00 p.m. Currently, our homeless guests are arriving prior to 6:00 p.m. and we believe that an earlier start time will be responsive to the concerns of our neighbors.

3. On weekdays, we will stay open a little longer in the morning in order to provide more time for social workers of other social service agencies to work with the guests of the shelter to help enable them to move toward more permanent shelter options.
4. We will endeavor to find another church or social service agency that will partner with us to provide a day center for the homeless. This will provide another option for day-time shelter of the homeless.
5. We will work with other faith communities or social service agencies outside of the City of Green Bay to provide shelter to some of the homeless who come to St. John's. The concept visualizes a person checking in at the St. John Homeless Shelter site but then being transported to other sites outside of the City of Green Bay for overnight shelter. The ability of this program to work needs to respect and adhere to guidelines for safety and security.
6. Finally, if we have sufficient funds, we believe that it would be advantageous to have a social worker serve as the Executive Director of the shelter on a twelve-month basis. In this fashion, we can maintain contact with the homeless throughout the year even though we are not providing shelter accommodations. This will provide us with the opportunity for a continuum of support so that our homeless brothers and sisters are provided with as many options as possible to find permanent housing.

We, as the Catholic Church cannot shirk from this Gospel imperative and we as a community cannot turn our backs on those who are in need. Therefore, we must be ready to give shelter to our homeless brothers and sisters next winter.