

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **Green Bay Press-Gazette**

[Back](#)

Editorial: Homeless situation won't go away by ignoring it

Advertisement

Issue: The chronically homeless

November 4, 2007

Archbishop Timothy Dolan of Milwaukee sent a respectful but unequivocal message Friday to Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt: The Catholic Diocese of Green Bay will run an emergency homeless shelter at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, starting within a few days.

It's about time someone acted decisively. The overnight temperatures have started drifting into the 20s, with flurries possible Monday night.

Dolan, who is apostolic administrator of the Green Bay Diocese while it awaits appointment of a new bishop, acknowledged Schmitt's continuous efforts the past two months to find an alternative to the St. John's location. The City Council voted unanimously Aug. 21 not to permit a zoning variance for the church gymnasium to serve as a homeless shelter for a third winter.

The archbishop also fired a shot across the bow by gently referring to First Presbyterian Church v. City of New York, where a federal appeals court ruled the city had no right to prevent people from sleeping on the church's steps.

Schmitt deserves credit for keeping the issue on the front burner, even though some vocal council members clearly want the homeless simply to leave town. He kept pressing for a solution up to the moment the archbishop decided to assert the church's First Amendment right to fulfill its ministry, which includes giving shelter to the homeless.

In many ways, this is the best possible short-term outcome to an issue that has generated a great deal of emotion in recent weeks. The archbishop has placed the Catholic Church's full support behind making sure the homeless will be sheltered and the concerns of the church's neighbors will be addressed.

It's too bad the issue has to be resolved in a way that forces the church to act in opposition to city ordinances, however respectfully. Schmitt indicated late Friday he would rather work with the church, to bring it into compliance with city codes, rather than fight a pretty clear legal precedent. He thinks the council will go along, and we hope he's right.

This has been a tough challenge because it's about tough cases. These are the homeless people who can't or won't fit into the program at the New Community Shelter, which has a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol use, for example. But everyone needs a place to go when the temperatures dip below freezing.

Now — not next year at this time — is the time to start talking about the next step. As Schmitt recognized when he established his Mayor's Chronic Homelessness Task Force, this community needs a long-range plan to end chronic homelessness. In many ways the faith community, not government, is best equipped to lead the way, as Dolan is doing.

Deacon Tim Reilly, diocesan director of administration, pointed out that the church's call to shelter the

homeless is found in the words of the prophet Isaiah, written 2,700 years ago. The homeless are still with us, 27 centuries later, and they can't be ignored.