

# **Poverty and Homelessness Task Force Final Report Davis Community Church**

**July 21, 2015**

“Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.”

~Luke 14: 21

“I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

~Pope Francis, 2014

## ***Introduction and Background***

In October 2013, the session addressed safety and security concerns on the campus by creating a task force. This task force identified ten potential risks and suggested possible solutions for each risk. In its final report to the session in June 2014, the task force recommended, and the session unanimously agreed, that a new, expanded task force form and that this new Poverty and Homeless Task Force (PHTF) execute the following six recommendations:

1. Ensure that signage and landscaping on campus be modified and/or used to enhance DCC's ministries.
2. Institute a greater human security presence on campus to ensure a safe and welcoming ambience for all.
3. Create and/or build cooperative relationships between local churches, regional agencies and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) that positively impact the lives and opportunities of local poor and homeless individuals.
4. Promote that DCC intentionally minister with poor and homeless individuals, consistent with the church's resources and Christian ethics.
5. Implement programs, classes and communications to enhance Christ-like understanding, acceptance and willingness to help those who are less fortunate.
6. Recommend and implement ways in which the poor and homeless could have a greater role in DCC's ministries and programs.

During its August 2014 meeting, the session commissioned the newly formed PHTF; two members of the previous task force continued with the PHTF and serve as co-moderators. The PHTF is comprised of a diverse array of members. We differ in perspective, age, life experience, DCC ministry experience, socioeconomic status, and more, and yet we are united in our passion and commitment to making DCC welcoming, ministering to and with those on the margins, and sharing God's love with all.

Since September 2014, the PHTF has been meeting on the first and third Wednesdays of every month. We have reflected and meditated on scripture, prayed together, and used a communal discernment approach to decision-making. While we have grown in our faith and in our trust of each other, we have also felt overwhelmed by the complex nature of the task before us. Indeed, how to best follow Christ in our care for the least of these is not always straightforward. Moreover, during our time together we lost three members who felt called to other pursuits. Despite these struggles, we are ending our time together in unanimous support of the opinions and conclusions presented.

In this report, we describe how we have addressed the above six recommendations and how we hope to encourage other DCC groups to carry out the implementation of some aspects of the recommendations. We also include our own recommendations for how we may continue deepening DCC's ministry and connection to those experiencing poverty and homelessness and the greater Davis community.

## ***Progress***

I. *Signage*—One of our first duties as a task force was to develop and finalize language for new signs that is welcoming to all visitors while also requesting that they be mindful and considerate:

Davis Community Church welcomes you  
to our sacred grounds from sunrise to sunset  
for spiritual practices as well as for planned programs.  
Please refrain from smoking, using drugs or alcohol,  
being offensive in language or behavior, loitering, leaving objects, staying overnight,  
or bringing unleashed or aggressive animals.

Thank you.

(CA Penal Code #602 and Article 26 of the Davis Municipal Code)

For assistance, please visit the church office  
or call 530-750-0474 (for on-call pastor).  
For emergencies, call 911.

This signage was approved by Session and adopted as church policy in 2014. These signs are now posted around the church campus. When able, members of the DCC staff enforce this policy during the daytime, though an additional human presence is needed on campus to provide more consistent enforcement (see below, under 'Ministry of Presence').

The task force has also created a pamphlet containing guidelines to follow while visiting DCC as well as information on community resources. These pamphlets are located near the bulletin board outside of the church office. A copy of the pamphlet is included at the end of this report.

II. *Designated Dog Area*—In response to concerns about “un-leashed” dogs on campus, the task force created a designated dog area. Located behind the sheds of D St. House, the area provides chains for securing dogs, water, potty bags, and a

garbage can. We ask that everyone visiting the campus with a dog (except for service dogs) use this area, unless they are walking through campus with a leashed dog.

III. *Security Presence at Night*—We cannot allow individuals to sleep on our campus without supervision. Undertaking the formation of a nighttime supervision program (presumably run by DCC volunteers) is logistically prohibitive at this time. Therefore, after much prayer and discussion the task force recommended that Paladin Security Services patrol the campus during the nighttime hours. For approximately one month, starting in December 2014, Paladin patrolled the campus twice per night. They now patrol the campus once per night, and we will continue using their services for a minimum of one additional year.

IV. *Advocacy*— A group of members from the task force as well as the Church and Society ministry began meeting in November 2014, to advocate for the city of Davis to expand and improve its efforts to help those experiencing homelessness. The advocacy group's first step was to send five individuals, members of the advocacy group and members of the homeless community, to the December 2014 City Council meeting to voice their concerns. Their message was well received, and City Council Member Robb Davis encouraged the group to begin the process of bringing in individuals from other faiths/denominations to grow their presence and effectiveness.

Thus far, three interfaith advocacy meetings have been held. The group has worked on putting together a broader network of individuals of faith as well as identifying advocacy goals. At its June 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting, a city-contracted facilitator helped the group agree on its priority action recommendations. These are to be presented at a special summit meeting of community and city government representatives, organized by Robb Davis and scheduled for June 17<sup>th</sup>, where approaches to supporting homeless individuals will be explored. The advocacy group's next steps are largely dependent on what comes out of that summit meeting. One possibility is to help facilitate the development of a pilot project to promote the use of "tiny houses" as part of a "housing first" strategy.

### ***Recommendations for Moving Forward***

I. *Ministry of Presence*—The PHTF proposes that DCC consider implementing what we are calling a Ministry of Presence program as a way to "intentionally minister with the poor or homeless", to help "ensure a safe and welcoming ambience for all", and to be a beacon of God's love to the Davis community in new and exciting ways. We propose starting small with this program and then expanding it as needs, dreams, and resources evolve.

There are two branches of this program. We are calling volunteers involved in the first branch Ministers of Hospitality, and we are calling volunteers in the second branch Docents. Both of these branches of the Ministry of Presence will increase the human presence on campus and contribute to deepening DCC's connection to those visiting our campus as well as the surrounding community. Moreover, building

relationships with individuals contributes to easier interactions when boundary setting is needed.

- A. *Ministers of Hospitality*—We propose that these volunteers could play a vital role in an expanded Brown Bag Lunch Program. This is a program that DCC has been running successfully for more than 25 years, and it represents a straightforward and simple starting point. We would like Ministers of Hospitality (MOH) to be trained to provide a compassionate, listening, friendly presence to those seeking to enjoy their Brown Bag lunches on campus. Volunteers who have served Brown Bag lunches have enjoyed getting to know folks who come in, but there is rarely a chance to make more of a connection. We hope that the MOH could facilitate this more easily, at least with some of our guests.
  - a. We would ask at least two MOH to be available from 11:30 AM-1:00 PM, Monday – Thursday. They would be present to share a meal with Brown Bag Lunch guests on the church campus. Tables could be set up under the C St. patio covered area (right next to the office), and the MOH would provide a compassionate presence.
  - b. We have already had several conversations with DCC’s Minister of Congregational Care, Elisa Stone, and she is excited about leading this new ministry, if approved. These conversations have included the importance of training and support for the MOH. Training topics would include mental health first aid, deep listening, boundary setting, and spirituality issues. In addition to training, MOH must be willing to participate in monthly support/supervision meetings. Requiring training and support underscores that this is not a ministry of fixing (that’s up to God), but a ministry of compassionate presence.
  
- B. *Docents*— As we joyfully anticipate the rejuvenation of our sanctuary, the PHTF proposes that DCC consider opening its doors to the community in new and different ways. Because we are located in the very heart of Davis, we boldly imagine that DCC could grow into becoming a cultural and spiritual center for the community, as an alternative to, or in addition to, the offerings at Central Park. Toward that end, we propose that DCC literally opens its doors to the public, during limited daytime hours, to provide space for spiritual practices and educational or cultural programs. Some visitors may choose to use our beautiful campus grounds as a quiet space for meditation, prayers, or private, thoughtful conversations. Others may wish to check out our library, or to spend time in silence or in prayer in our newly renovated sanctuary. To realize this vision, we need a human presence on campus, our proposed docent volunteers.
  - a. Docents are guides in cultural or religious institutions. Our docents would be specially trained to function as both hosts and guides. By equipping them with historical knowledge of our church and buildings, they would play a welcoming role, ushering, guiding, and helping visitors as well as members of our church.
  - b. We also envision offering a variety of musical, spiritual or educational opportunities in the sanctuary, library, and fellowship

hall, or around the campus grounds throughout the week. Noontime bring-your-own-lunch musical performances, lectures, open mike/"ted talks," and discussions on social issues, etc. could be featured. The docents would be the essential volunteer staff for these kinds of events and programs. We propose starting modestly, with one or two programs, and expanding as needed.

## II. *Recommendations for Other Groups*

- A. *Adult Formation*—We suggest that this ministry continue offering regular classes on homelessness, the increasing economic divide, and other topics related to poverty and/or homelessness.
- B. *Buildings and Grounds*—This ministry takes the lead on addressing the issues of safety and security on the DCC campus, including timely and appropriate communication with and supervision of Paladin security service. We recommend that they continue altering DCC's landscaping to make the campus safer and to enhance DCC's commitment to caring for creation.
- C. *Church and Society*— Given the complex and enduring nature of poverty and homelessness, we recommend the formation of a small leadership group of three individuals from the congregation, reporting to Church and Society, for the dedicated purpose of advocating, coordinating, facilitating, and supporting all poverty-related programs of DCC, now and in the future.

III. *Role for those Experiencing Poverty and/or Homelessness*—DCC has already provided some opportunities for individuals to be involved in the life of DCC. For example, several homeless individuals regularly participate in Everybody Eats! (Community Meal) by helping with preparation, serving and cleaning up. In addition, a handful of homeless individuals recently became members of DCC, and we hope that they can continue to be involved in its life by serving as lay liturgists, helping out on work days, being involved in groups and ministries, and serving on committees.

We anticipate that more specific tasks and ways of engaging DCC life can eventually be proposed, after getting to know more of the gifts, skills and interests of the various guests who visit our campus. Indeed, we envision involving interested guests in the process of discerning how they might be called to be involved in the life of DCC. These conversations could evolve naturally out of the relationships formed via the Ministry of Presence (see above).

## ***Concluding Remarks***

As a sequel to the original task force, the Poverty and Homelessness Task Force was charged to bring to fruition a set of six recommendations, ranging from security concerns to advocacy for and ministry with "the least among us". Whenever possible, the PHTF has made a concerted effort, in its considerations and

communications, to be gracious and welcoming to all God's children, regardless of one's circumstances and particularities, while also requesting that all be mindful and respectful while visiting our sacred grounds.

As we fully celebrate the many existing congregation-wide ministries, such as Everybody Eats!, the Interfaith Winter Rotating Shelter, and the Brown Bag Lunch, the PHTF has found the phrase, "human presence", in the previous task force's recommendations, to be most vital and compelling. In fact, our proposed Ministry of Presence, which highlights the importance of relationship, community, and inclusiveness, would enable a sustainable human presence on the DCC campus. DCC would be able to open its doors to the world, beyond worship and other events, to all God's children to pray, meditate, and connect with the spirit of the Living and Loving God, and to be in community with one another.

DCC is also called to become more intentional in our advocacy for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized among us. We feel hopeful and excited about the progress of DCC's interfaith advocacy group. Finally, we look forward to the establishment of a poverty leadership group to oversee and coordinate DCC's poverty and homelessness programs, and to ensure that they stay connected to the life of the congregation.

Respectfully submitted,

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