# Recommendations of the Working Group on All Souls' Unhoused Neighbors

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### Introduction

Our tradition of congregational polity means that the whole congregation bears responsibility for the ways our church's operations affect our neighbors, our city, and our world. The Working Group on All Souls' Unhoused Neighbors is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the particular decision of how to address the use of the church grounds by unhoused neighbors.

The Working Group was convened by Executive Director Traci Hughes Trotter and Rev. Rob Keithan to make recommendations to the Executive Team for a new policy regarding the use of the church grounds by unhoused neighbors. Though people have slept on the porch at the top of the steps on the 16th Street front of the church for years, the intensity of that use increased significantly during the closure of the building due to the covid pandemic. In particular, the number of people staying on the porch, the hours people are present on the porch, and the storage of personal belongings all increased over the course of 2020 and into the spring of 2021. This has limited the use of portions of the terrace and playground due to sanitation hazards and has raised potential safety concerns.

The following findings and recommendations reflect the need to maintain a safe and healthy environment for the All Souls community, keeping in mind All Souls' Eight Principles and the

church's commitment to compassionate social justice. They are also intended to meet All Souls' commitments to the Mysa School, an important part of the community.

The Working Group finds that without regularly enforced rules and boundaries, the presence of people living on church grounds poses a health and safety risk to Mysa School, Religious Education students, and All Souls congregants, as well as an unacceptable burden for All Souls staff. We cannot promise that our recommended policies will fully solve the problem, but we agree that the status quo is unsustainable and a new approach is necessary. We recommend implementation of new policies during a 90-day trial period, followed by an assessment of what adjustments are needed or whether an entirely new strategy should be adopted.

Extension of the new policies beyond 90 days will depend heavily on All Souls' ability to communicate and work with those seeking shelter on the portico. It will also depend on whether All Souls is able to set and enforce clear boundaries regarding use of the property. We recognize that changes like these will not be instantaneous and that it will take time to establish new cultural norms on the porch.

We also recognize that both the church staff and the congregation are still learning how to manage the fact of people sleeping on the porch and that more experience and information will likely lead to changes in policy and implementation strategies.

We also recognize that All Souls would not begin to meet its moral obligation to the unhoused members of our community even if we were to allow free access to church property at all times. We therefore recommend strongly that assistance to the unhoused and pursuit of long-term solutions to homelessness become a church priority, backed up by funding, volunteer commitment, and staff coordination.

# Recommendation of the Working Group

For the next 90 days, the working group recommends that the church establish and enforce a clear policy whereby the church clarifies that it does not intend to evict unhoused community members who are sleeping on the church grounds between specified night-time hours, provided that all All Souls community members, including our unhoused neighbors, comply with established rules regarding safety and sanitation. The recommended policy is outlined in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

# Short-term policy recommendation

To ensure the safety of All Souls congregants, members of the Mysa School community, and the well-being of all community members, we recommend All Souls establish a policy<sup>1</sup> that—

 allows people on the 16th Street steps or porch between the hours of 7 am and 9 pm only if they are—

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> We understand that the church is undertaking a review of its lease and insurance policies to ensure that any policy adopted is consistent with its other obligations under those contracts and to determine any potential liability associated with such policy. We appreciate the need for any policy to comply with All Souls' obligations under its lease with the Mysa School, the church's insurance policy, and DC law.

- o in the process of entering or exiting the building through the 16th Street doors; or,
- participating in an activity authorized by the church, the church's tenant, or by an individual or organization renting space at the church;
- allows people within the church building, the terrace, and the playground, at any time, only if they are participating in an activity authorized by the church, the church's tenant, or an individual or organization renting space at the church;
- requires the removal of all unattended personal belongings from the grounds between 7am and 9pm;
- prohibits any illegal activity on the church grounds, including violence and illegal drug use;
- prohibits cooking or campfires that are not part of an activity organized by the church, the church's tenant, or an individual or organization renting space at the church;
- prohibits alcohol use that is not part of an activity organized by the church, the church's tenant, or an individual or organization renting space at the church;
- prohibits urination or defecation outside of a restroom or portable toilet;
- prohibits disposal of trash anywhere other than a trash can or dumpster.

These policies are intentionally crafted to address certain behaviors in certain locations at certain times, rather than policies specific to a person's housing status. For instance, a prohibition on unhoused neighbors being on the church grounds during the day would prohibit a person experiencing homelessness from attending a worship service, or participating in ESL classes. By allowing presence on the grounds during certain times only for people participating in activities authorized by the church, its tenant, or entities renting space, we can create a policy that is equally applicable to housed and unhoused people alike.

In our discussions, we have grouped the types of tools necessary for implementation of this policy into three categories: security, sanitation, and outreach. We recommend that All Souls use the following tools to implement the above policy in the short term:

#### Security

- signs describing the policies related to use of the grounds, posted on the 16th Street front of the building, on fences, and in other appropriate locations as determined by the executive team, in English (using <u>plain language</u>), Spanish, and any other appropriate language, as well as graphic representations for those who cannot read.
- paper letters expressing the policies related to use of the grounds, in English (using <u>plain language</u>), Spanish, and any other appropriate language, handed directly to people who are present on the 16th Street steps between 9 pm and 7 am, or people who are found to be violating the above policies.
- one-on-one conversations between people who stay overnight on the 16th Street steps and church staff and volunteers.

- a facility assessment to determine what immediate security improvements can be made (securing locks, a locking cover for outdoor outlets, adding cameras<sup>2</sup>, removing landscaping).
- DC Police, in accordance with the church's <u>Security Policy</u>.

#### Sanitation

- o management of unattended personal items as follows:
  - temporary removal of any unattended personal items found on church grounds between the hours of 7 am and 9 pm.
  - return of removed items to the location where they were found before staff leave for the evening with a written warning that items will be permanently removed if they are still present the next day.
  - permanent removal of personal items that are present for more than two days<sup>3</sup>.
- o maintenance of a portable toilet on the 16th Street front of the church.
- a contract with a cleaning company for power washing, removal of trash and items, and removal of human waste to supplement current staff for short-term surge support on a frequency to be determined based on input from staff. (See Appendix A for more information.)

#### Outreach

- resources and expertise of the DC Downtown Cluster of Congregations, including the cluster's outreach worker.
- one-on-one conversations between people who stay overnight on the 16th Street steps and church staff and volunteers.
- the DC Department of Behavioral Health Community Response Team, when available and in accordance with the church's <u>Security Policy</u>.

In order to support the successful implementation of the tools above, we recommend the following strategies:

- daily recording of data related to violations of this policy (i.e., how often do staff remove unattended personal belongings, how often do staff clean up human waste, how often are people present on the church grounds in violation of this policy).
- photographs to document violations of the unattended-belongings policy.
- bonus pay for staff who have been responsible for addressing waste and other issues over the last year that have resulted from people living on the church grounds.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> We understand that the church already has a security camera system. While cameras can be a helpful tool in securing the church's property and ensuring the safety of everyone on it, we are concerned that exterior cameras that face the street can in some circumstances be used by law enforcement and immigration officials as broader surveillance tools, especially if images from the cameras are recorded and stored (and subject to subpoena), rather than only available to be viewed live. We urge that any cameras on church grounds be installed and operated in a way that minimizes the potential for them to be misappropriated by police or immigration agents to surveil or identify individuals on our grounds, in our building, or walking by on the public sidewalk.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> All Souls might consider providing an outdoor storage container, away from the portico, terrace, and playground, for temporary storage of bulky or heavy belongings.

 consistent implementation of this new policy throughout the day, which requires significant staff or contractor engagement with people sleeping on the church grounds and people violating the new policy. (See <u>Staffing Strategies</u> section.)

We recommend that, during the initial 90-day period, All Souls also conduct a thorough assessment of security vulnerabilities in the building and on church grounds to help ensure that the church building, terrace, and playground can only be accessed as authorized by the church.

# 90-day review

At the end of the 90-day trial period, All Souls should evaluate the effectiveness of the new policy to inform adoption of a long-term approach. The evaluation should consider the experiences of All Souls staff, Mysa staff, congregants, and community members, as well as data that is collected during the trial period. The working group believes that the data collected and lessons learned from this trial period will be instrumental in deciding whether this policy is sustainable for the church and its tenant in the long-term. The working group would be happy to participate in such a review, if requested by the Executive Team.

As part of that review, the working group recommends the following considerations:

- Has there been a meaningful reduction in safety risks?
- Have the sanitation problems been eliminated?
- Are the church staff able to perform their core duties? In this scenario, the church staff
  are either no longer responsible for cleaning human waste and managing interactions
  with people who are sleeping on the porch, or a plan is in place to change staff
  members' duties and training, and to provide protective gear, commensurate
  compensation and other tools to effectuate the policy. (See <u>Staffing Strategies</u> section
  for more specific recommendations on this point).
- Has the church determined that this decision to not evict unhoused neighbors from 9pm
  to 7am is consistent with its other obligations and that it is prepared to absorb any risk to
  its finances and other ministries associated with continued use of the property in this
  way? (We understand that the Executive Team is undergoing legal review of the options
  and would recommend that such review be considered at this juncture.)
- Do the unhoused neighbors agree that this will be a sustainable policy for them and have they identified any other recommendations that might be necessary for long-term success of the policy?
- Has the church identified adequate budget for cleaning and rule enforcement to ensure that this approach would be sustainable over the long term?

We recommend the Executive Team consider the following conditions as a measure of success of the policy:

- 1) Regular occupants of the porch are:
  - Leaving the area every day by 7 a.m. and not returning until 9 p.m.;
  - Removing all belongings during the day;
  - Using only the portable toilet to relieve themselves;

- Placing all trash in trash cans;
- Keeping the portico free of litter;
- Not entering the playground or terrace;
- Refraining from any illegal activity on church grounds;
- Sharing in the creation of a culture of respect for the church, its grounds, staff, and community.
- 2) Only the portable toilet or indoor bathroom are used for individuals to go to the bathroom (i.e., no human waste is found on the church property);
- All Souls staff report that they are not being asked to perform duties outside of their stated job responsibilities and that they have the tools necessary for effective implementation of the policy; and
- 4) Effective and open communication has been established with unhoused neighbors. While temporary staffing adjustments, extra part-time staff, or contracted staff are likely to be needed during the trial period to make sure porch occupants understand and accept All Souls' requirements, permanent staffing decisions should be made only after the 90-day review and determination of a long-term policy. (See "Staffing Strategies" for more details.)

# Long-term policy options

The working group has identified two options for a long-term policy and recommends that the decision between them be informed by the 90-day review outlined above. At the Executive Team's request, the working group has focused the majority of its time on developing a sustainable approach to people sleeping on the porch. If, however, the Executive Team finds that the recommended policy is not successful after 90 days, members of the working group would be willing to research effective strategies to establish boundaries such that sleeping on the grounds would be prohibited. In all cases, the working group recommends that any long-term option include a significant commitment to ministry to the unhoused.

# Option 1: Adopt short-term recommendation outlined above as long-term policy and establish additional ministry to the unhoused community

If the 90-day review finds that the new policy meets the conditions for success, we recommend that it be continued with these additional actions:

- Implement strategies identified by the facility assessment to improve the physical security of the building. For example, consider raising the height of the existing fence along Harvard Street, and any other similar areas, to a height that provides a true deterrent to people who might try to jump over the fence into the terrace and the playground.
- Add de-escalation and non-violent communication training to training requirements for all staff. We believe that these skills are valuable in many contexts beyond those that arise with unhoused neighbors, including many circumstances in congregational life, and are consistent with All Souls' Eight Principles. All Souls has hosted non-violent communication skills training for congregants in the past; we would recommend similar training, adapted for a professional environment, for staff.

- Invest in long-term staffing for communication and interaction with people who stay overnight on the 16th Street steps. (See "Staffing Strategies" section.)
- Develop a stronger relationship with Downtown Cluster of Congregations to share resources and expertise with other congregations in similar situations and to support the resources provided by the cluster, especially the cluster's outreach worker.
- Develop new relationships with The Community Partnership and with organizations that provide outreach services for unhoused people in the neighborhood, including Friendship Place and Thrive DC, that can respond to circumstances that require an outreach worker.

# Option 2: Prohibit sleeping on the steps and establish additional ministry to the unhoused community

As noted above, the working group spent the majority of its time focused on developing effective strategies to implement Option 1. However, the church may wish to consider prohibiting sleeping on the steps and portico if--

- significant improvement is not achieved in the 90-day trial period;
- All Souls determines that it lacks the resources to ensure maintenance of this policy or that such resources could be invested in ways that would better contribute to unhoused neighbors' well-being; or,
- risks are identified that the church is not able or willing to bear.

Consideration of this option reflects the concerns of some in the working group that the significant resources necessary to implement Option 1 might have greater positive impacts for unhoused people if invested in other ways. However, more information would be needed to fully evaluate 1) how expensive Option 1 ends up being in practice; and 2) the actual costs and efficacy of Option 2.



One tool that could be considered to prevent sleeping on the steps is a physical barrier like gates at top of the steps, similar to these in the adjacent picture of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the church All Souls' design is based on. The working group considers this to be a more viable option for a physical barrier than a fence around the entire property.

There may be other security measures that could aid in preventing people from sleeping on the porch, including a dedicated overnight staff person or contractor to prevent people from being present overnight, or pooling security resources with neighboring churches facing similar issues.

We recognize that a decision like this would require extensive deliberation by the congregation and a significant discernment process to ensure that it best meets our Principles and upholds our values. We offer it out of a wish that the funds that the church may spend on cleaning and security services could instead be spent on improving the lives of unhoused neighbors, and a recognition of the possibility that the long-term implementation of Option 1 may not be consistent with the church's other commitments and obligations to its tenant and community.

# **Staffing Strategies**

The working group believes a person needs to be at the church every day at 7 am to request that people leave church grounds in accordance with the new policy. We also believe a person is likely needed at key moments during the day, such as lunch time for the school, at least until the new schedule and expectations are established. In addition to asking people to leave the grounds during the daytime hours, staff engagement is necessary to repeatedly explain and reinforce the rules as described in the policy.

We believe this additional staffing is necessary in the immediate term, and for as long as people are sleeping on the porch. We have discussed the following options, but are unable to make a recommendation due to insufficient information:

- Hire a contractor to provide unarmed security personnel, in accordance with All Souls' values and policies. (We have not been able to identify a contractor who we are confident meets these terms and would provide the specific service needed. See <a href="Appendix B">Appendix B</a> for more details.)
- Hire a new part-time staff position that includes outreach to unhoused neighbors as part
  of the job duties. (We have discussed the possibility that a social work student may be a
  good fit for such a position, but have not found any examples of such an arrangement.
   See <u>Appendix A</u> for more details.)
- Hire a contractor to provide regular outside cleaning and sanitation services. (We are not sure if regular sanitation services would meet the need for immediate response to incidences of human waste.)
- Add these duties to the job description of an existing staff position, provide training in de-escalation and nonviolent communication skills, and increase pay commensurate with these new duties. (We do not know if any current staff would be willing to take on this role with an increase in pay.)
- Organize a group of regular volunteers from the congregation to perform this task. (We are not confident that there are enough volunteers to cover all the times and days when a person is needed, especially in the near term when presence during the school day will also likely be necessary.)
- Contract with a member of DC's unhoused community to ensure that people depart the church grounds with all of their personal belongings by 7 am each morning. (We have heard from other churches in the area that the people who sleep on their grounds typically begin to enforce the rules with others on the grounds so that the grounds remain available overnight. We have discussed formalizing that arrangement and paying a person who is regularly present overnight to ensure compliance with the rules. We are

unaware of any examples of such an arrangement, or whether any of the people currently spending the night on the steps would be a good fit for such an arrangement.)

# Long-term direct service to unhoused neighbors

Our working group came up with many ideas of ways All Souls could be of service to unhoused neighbors. However, we believe that the process of deciding which ideas to pursue is as important as the details of the eventual work. Several working group members are interested in beginning this process once this working group completes its work.

#### Discernment

As we have worked to develop these recommendations, we have come to recognize how much we don't know about the circumstances that are faced by people who are unhoused. We believe that, before embarking on any new direct service ministries, we need to learn directly from people who have experience living on the street.

One first step could be a conversation or listening session between a small group of congregants and staff with people sleeping on the porch to better understand their specific needs in order to guide decisions about what direct service programs the church might invest in. Mary Ford and Tobie Smith are interested in leading next steps on this idea.

There are many organizations in All Souls' neighborhood, as well as DC as a whole, that have long experience working with and providing services to people who are unhoused. We believe an important task is identifying organizations that share All Souls' values and that we could fruitfully support and partner with.

As All Souls develops a ministry of direct service, we believe it is imperative that the church not duplicate existing services, add to the fragmentation of service organizations, or pull resources away from existing service providers that are home to caseworkers and other experts in this area. All Souls should seek to contribute to the important work already being done in our area, rather than duplicate it in pursuit of doing something "new".

## What we are currently interested in working on

In addition to identifying opportunities to contribute and build upon existing work in our community, we also recognize the importance of ensuring sufficient interest and enthusiasm from members of the congregation before beginning a new ministry group. In initial conversations, and recognizing that the discernment process above may point in a different direction, group members expressed near-term interest in three topics:

For just over a year, All Souls has hosted A Pantry For All Souls, a Little Free Pantry
where All Souls congregants and neighbors can donate and receive free grocery goods.
This is an established ministry that needs additional volunteers, and we recommend
continued support and additional promotion of this volunteer opportunity. Maya Hermann
will continue on the leadership team for this.

- There are several existing food pantries and soup kitchens in All Souls' neighborhood, including Martha's Table and St. Stephen's. All Souls could organize regular volunteer opportunities with these existing services. Mary Ford is interested in leading this.
- All Souls has a long history of providing and supporting affordable housing in the neighborhood. There is interest in learning whether the existing All Souls Housing Ministry might expand into issues of transitional housing and supportive housing, in addition to the affordable housing work it already does. Tobie Smith is engaging with the Housing Ministry to begin a conversation on this topic.

#### Other ideas

We have many other ideas of how All Souls could be of service to our unhoused neighbors. Some additional ideas for consideration, after the discernment process outlined above and if sufficient interest and energy among congregants exists to pursue these:

- The Religious Education program engages children in RE classes to make sack lunches and distribute them to people living on the street several times per year. We recommend continued support for this activity.
- The Religious Education program also collects school supplies for donation to children in a local family shelter. We recommend continued support for this activity.
- All Souls has an excellent kitchen. There may be service organizations that could make use of our kitchen to provide hot food to people who need it.
- After gaining experience through volunteering with local food pantries and soup kitchens, as well as discussions with existing service organizations reveals a need for an additional food distribution site in the area, All Souls could become a distribution partner for Capital Area Food Bank.
- The church is currently hosting a portable toilet on the 16th Street side of the church. Knowing how important public toilets are to many city residents (not just the unhoused) we recommend this continue, perhaps in conjunction with the Toilet Ministry public witness idea in the Advocacy section.
- Every year, DC conducts a Point In Time survey to count the number of people without homes over one short period in January. Volunteers are always needed to help complete the count. All Souls could organize a group of congregants to volunteer together.
- Foundry Methodist, our neighbor down 16th Street, runs an <u>ID Ministry</u> where volunteers help people get birth certificates, ID cards, and other forms of identification that are often necessary to access health, employment, and housing services. All Souls could organize a group of congregants to regularly volunteer together with this program.
- All Souls could distribute cell phones or phone cards to people living on the street in our neighborhood.
- All Souls could provide an electrical outlet for neighbors to charge their phones and other electronics at a location that does not conflict with other uses of the building and grounds.
- All Souls Music and Arts program could partner with musicians and artists that are unhoused.

 There are many organizations in our neighborhood that serve unhoused people including Pathways to Housing and Jubilee Jobs. All Souls could partner with organizations like these.

# Advocacy related to chronic homelessness

The Working Group has discussed a few options for ways to organize future work on issues of homelessness--both the direct service activities above, as well as the advocacy activities in this section. We are grateful for the long leadership of the All Souls Housing Ministry, and are interested in talking with the members of that group, as well as Rev. Rob Keithan, about whether it makes sense to pursue these ideas as an expansion of the Housing Ministry's work, or as a new ministry group within the church, or as a series of ad hoc committees gathered for particular purposes, or some other option. Mary Ford and Tobie Smith are interested in taking the lead on a process to decide which structure would work best. The group offers the ideas below without a specific structure in mind at this time.

All Souls could host a series of events built around opportunities for congregants to learn more about these issues, including:

- a Sunday service dedicated to issues facing unhoused people, with participation by congregation members who have experienced homelessness, if they would like to participate.
- through Adult Spiritual Development, a book club or movie screening with discussion around a text that addresses issues of homelessness.
- a partnership with ADORE to host a discussion regarding the connection between homelessness and racial justice issues. Noel Tieszen is a member of the 8th Principle Taskforce and is interested in leading this idea.

The All Souls Housing Ministry has advocated for affordable housing in Columbia Heights and DC for decades. Ultimately, the solution for homelessness is housing, so continued support for the Housing Ministry's work to make housing affordable for all DC residents is a critical part of All Souls efforts on these issues.

All Souls Social Justice Ministries have an ongoing advocacy campaign around the DC budget process. That campaign could include advocacy for services and resources for people experiencing chronic homelessness, including mental health services.

Beyond the DC budget campaign, All Souls could partner with organizations like Miriam's Kitchen's Way Home Campaign that holds the DC government accountable for implementation of programs for people experiencing homelessness.

All Souls could partner with UUs for Social Justice to advocate for services and programs for people experiencing homelessness at the federal level.

For as long as the portable toilet is present on 16th Street, we could use it as an opportunity for public witness on the need for more public toilets in DC through signage and advocacy

information on the Public Restroom Facilities Installation & Promotion Act and its implementation. The People For Fairness Campaign is the lead organization on this issue in DC and may be a good organization to partner with. Maya Hermann, MJ Crom, and Noel Tieszen are interested in leading the next steps on this.

#### Conclusion

The Working Group is grateful to the Executive Team for the opportunity to engage in this problem and dig deeply into potential solutions. While there remain many unanswered questions on this topic, this process has given us new insight into issues of homelessness in our neighborhood and our city, the consequences of the lack of affordable and accessible housing for our church community, and the practical questions facing institutions like All Souls in a city with a worsening housing shortage and the inevitable increase in people sleeping outside that follows.

Putting our Eight Principles into practice requires confronting the reality that there are no perfect solutions in an imperfect world. Our recommendations represent our best effort at enacting the Beloved Community in the world as it is, knowing it is not the world as it should be.

# Appendix A: Information Related to Commercial Cleaning Services

We have identified several cleaning services that will come on a regular basis, as well as ones that are available for rapid-response on an on-call basis. Prices will vary based on the services required - the estimates received were based on a weekly regular cleaning service and on-demand powerwashing requirements. Actual pricing could be lower if there was a regular commitment; the frequency and specific service requirements need to be provided for better cost estimates. Information from staff on frequency of incidents would help define the services needed. One option might be to have a regular cleaning on Sunday mornings before services (at a minimum) and to budget for some number of on demand calls to supplement staff per month.

#### **AnagoCleaning**

anagocleaning.com

301-429-0595 (office)

202-439-1800 (mobile)

Darren

Quoted (based on info provided - could provide other options based on needs)
Weekly Cleaning for \$541/month (description below) and on-demand power washing for \$680/service.

Weekly Service

- 1. Pick up all trash/litter (broken glass, papers, etc.) and place in onsite collection point.
- 2. Use blower to remove all fine particles debris (dirt, etc.)
- 3. Hose down specified areas. Water source provided by customer.

#### **ServePro**

Edwin Mwangi 301-659-9535 edwin@servpro1010.com

On-demand emergency powerwashing service \$716/service

#### BioOne DC

www.bioonedc.com/contact.html

202-699-2333

Wanted to do a site visit – sent information to Rob Keithan and Traci Hughes Trotter

#### **Executive Cleaning Services**

Executive-clean.com

Sent email on 6/9/21 with information--they don't do external cleaning but if we ever need inside cleaning they do churches.

# Appendix B: Information Related to Security Services

DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs <u>govservices.dcra.dc.gov/oplalicensesearch</u> Can verify the license of anyone we would work with and can search for companies or individual security professionals.

Securitas 202-277-7674

Recommended by Downtown DC (non-profit offering services to unhoused people)
Bob Cunningham called Kelly back and Kelly passed on the information to Traci for follow up.