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### **THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS**

*This is the first of a series of educational material being developed under the Diocese of Trenton Faith in Our Future Cohort #22 initiative concerning homelessness in Ocean County.*

Homelessness is the condition of people without a permanent dwelling. People who are homeless are most often unable to acquire and maintain regular, safe, secure and adequate housing.

We often think of the homeless as those adults we see at the former Lakewood Tent City or the current one in Howell. However, today's homeless population includes a growing number of two parent families, one parent families, working people, victims of domestic violence and the families torn apart by deportations.

### **WHO ARE THEY?**

They are seniors, families, disabled, mentally ill, adults, veterans, and young people. They are stigmatized, scared, lonely, depressed, worried, abandoned, shunned, bullied and embarrassed. They are all children of God.

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THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS:

WHY ARE THEY HOMELESS?

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**The working poor:** A growing number, of a new class of people, called the working poor are emerging. They have a full time job or several part time jobs, but do not earn enough to afford a car, car insurance, and a place to reside.

**The unemployed:** They have lost a job; they are unable to work because of a physical or mental illness; they have no transportation; they have a criminal record; they have no job experience or current skills; or they have no documentation.

**People with poor resources:** They have no family or friends; they had investments turn bad; they have depleted their savings; they are addicts or alcoholics.

**Catastrophic problems:** They have extraordinary medical bills; they have experienced foreclosure or eviction; they have unexpected auto or house expenses; they have lost their homes through fire or floods (many who are victims of Superstorm Sandy); and now immigration issues are causing the primary breadwinner to be separated from their family.

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**THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS:**

**A DIVERSE COMMUNITY**

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**Those without shelter are of all ages and backgrounds. They are children, young adults, families, resident citizens and immigrants, the elderly. According to a 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report for NJ,**

- **There were 583 homeless veterans;**
- **There was a 30% increase in those experiencing long-term homelessness;**
- **1939 children under the age of 18 are homeless. Of those children, 50% were 5 years of age or younger. Children under the age of 18 represent 22% of New Jersey's homeless population and 492 were kids without parents.**

**WHERE ARE THEY?**

**If they are fortunate, they have found temporary shelter thru organizations such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Charities, Interfaith Hospitality Network, Social Services or local churches. They are also in our neighborhoods. They sleep in a car. They move from friend to friend or between family when possible. They are in tents, stairwells, in the woods, under boardwalks, in the park. Sometimes they hide or trespass. Some can even be your co-workers who choose to use their pay for food or medicines or transportation.**

THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS:

WHAT DO WE OFFER?

*This is the fourth of a series of educational material being developed under the Diocese of Trenton Faith in Our Future Cohort #22 initiative concerning homelessness in Ocean County.*

The parishes of the cohort have:

- *St. Vincent de Paul Society* (with a food pantry) (All Churches)
- *Seeds of Service*, a center providing food, clothing, furniture, placement, counseling and mentoring (Visitation)
- *Participation in Interfaith Hospitality Network of Ocean County*, an interfaith consortium which takes turns hosting and housing families in the process of placement by social services (SML)
- *Catholic Charities of Lakewood*, which operates a food pantry, provides clothing and Immigration-Family Reunification services.
- *Vincents' Legacy* which provides furniture and household furnishings. Also provides free pick up of donations and delivery.

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**THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS:**

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

***This is the fifth of a series of educational material being developed under the Diocese of Trenton Faith in Our Future Cohort #22 initiative concerning homelessness in Ocean County.***

**We can do several things.**

**First and foremost, be considerate of feelings, understand the need to become independent or self-sufficient or able to support their own family. We can help to protect their privacy, help to navigate the available resources and be aware of the emotional, psychological and physical consequences of not having a safe place.**

**Secondly, we can get involved as a volunteer with existing organizations and /or become a member of the Cohort Committee and help develop this ministry. If you have any questions, need additional information on volunteer opportunities or have any ideas you would like to share, please contact:**

**John J. Romando at 732-379-9198, [jbmjinc@aol.com](mailto:jbmjinc@aol.com) as point of contact for St. Mary of the Lake Church**

**Or**

**Joan Olden 732-779-6049, [joanolden@yahoo.com](mailto:joanolden@yahoo.com) (Visitation Church)**

**May God's Peace and Love be with you.**