

# Acts Beyond Words Will Create Simple Housing

Speech to the **Association of Faith Communities** 9-5-14 by Robert Norse

I'm also a member of *HUFF*. We're mostly about restoring rights to homeless folks—rapidly disappearing rights. Rights stolen from the poor outside are ultimately stolen from all of us. We are in the midst of a historical period where one right after another, one sanctuary after another, one bench after another, is being removed in a campaign to target homeless people.

Simple housing is the most immediate need. It's elementary, obvious, and indisputable. Homeless people need simple housing—a place with a roof over the heads a place to sleep, a place to go to the bathroom, and a place to shower. Every night people are harassed and ticketed for falling asleep outside. Their possessions are vulnerable. Their safety, health, and sanity are at risk.

Simple housing isn't expensive. Not having it is. The City and County give away millions to homeless dispersal programs, for “security” gates and fences, for consultants and developers, for police equipment. Simple housing is what we need. And not tomorrow, but today.

We are living in a time when fear, bigotry, and greed. A time of special privilege. It hides under the labels of “public safety” and “smart solutions”. Those being offered a small amount of temporary housing while billed as “the most vulnerable” are often those who are simply the most visible and the most annoying. The ones who cost the most to businesses seeking tourist dollars. Owners angling for higher property values. Residents anxious for a view unobstructed by a poor family who park their home on a nearby street for a night. Or wait there for a church to open.

The faith community itself and those who seek the small amount of shelter that they are able to provide are under attack. Attack from the more privileged and the more fearful. Some in the faith community are reeling under these attacks. The bigots would “end homelessness” by driving homeless people away. A new move to ban nighttime parking around the Circles Church is the latest such attack. When police profile folks near church programs, we sadly see church workers urging the victims not to make waves, not to bring “undue attention” to the churches. There is no safety in such silence.

Let's agree we need immediately 1,000 simple housing units in Santa Cruz County. We obviously need more, but instead of “baby steps” let's take some real steps. Without unified and determined action, things will only grow worse. Upcoming elections provide gloomy prospects. The real solution—simple housing—is something we must work and fight for. Not just talk about.

Poverty and homelessness are controversial issues that necessarily create tension in the community. We must not flee from that tension or seek to conceal it. Nor beg crumbs from those who condition their funding on denying homeless people basic rights. We need to act.

We must move swiftly to create simple housing: a roof, a bed, a bathroom, & a shower. Make sense? Raise this issue repeatedly with your bodies as well as your voices. Support those who speak up for it and take action to promote it. **HUFF meets weekly on Wednesdays 11 to 1 at the Sub Rosa Cafe at 703 Pacific. Or give us a call at 831-423-4833.**

**This speech is the opinion of Robert Norse and does not necessarily represent that of *HUFF*.**