

# ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

*Serving together in faith*

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November 17, 2011

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501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600  
Portland, OR 97214

Commissioner Nick Fish  
1221 SW Fourth, Room 240  
Portland, OR 97204

Commissioners Fish and Kafoury:

In a recent meetings with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and other local faith community leaders, you described some of the current challenges faced by many in our community who are currently experiencing homelessness. Though our community-wide efforts have helped thousands move from homelessness into a stable home, on any given night, more than 1,700 people, including single individuals, couples, and families with children, sleep on Portland's streets.

As faith community leaders, we are deeply concerned by this ongoing crisis in our community, and we would like to work with the City of Portland, Multnomah County, and the not-for-profit community both to take immediate action to address homelessness and to pursue long-term strategies to end homelessness.

Specifically, in the short-term, we would like to work with you to create a policy context in which faith communities and not-for-profit service providers can partner to promote safety and a good night's sleep for people experiencing homelessness by hosting small-scale overnight sleeping programs within the City of Portland. Similar programs have operated successfully in other communities up and down the West Coast.

We expect that this proposal will pose several policy and logistical challenges, and we would like to meet with your team and others as soon as possible to begin addressing these challenges in a cooperative manner. Broadly, we envision opportunities to host overnight sleeping programs in faith community and not-for-profit agency parking lots throughout Portland on a pilot basis. These overnight sleeping programs would:

- be small in scale
- allow people to sleep overnight in vehicles, campers, trailers, tents or other temporary structures
- include access to toilets, garbage disposal service, and storage areas for guests to store personal items
- not require payment of any fee, rent or other monetary charge for overnight sleeping
- work directly with people sleeping at the property and with neighbors to make sure that the overnight sleeping programs maintain a positive presence in the community, while allowing a property owner to revoke permission for people to sleep overnight at their property at any time, especially if someone sleeping overnight on the property negatively affects the property owner or neighbors

We recognize that this proposal does not present a long-term solution to homelessness, but we believe that we can and must do more to realistically and compassionately address the immediate needs of people currently sleeping outside in our community. Further, we hope that we can partner these efforts with not-for-profit providers who can help overnight sleepers move into permanent housing. We look forward to meeting with your team and others very soon to discuss this proposal further.

Sincerely,

*Pastor Dennis Andersen*  
St. James Lutheran Church

*Rev. Dr. Anton DeWet, Senior Pastor*  
First Congregational United Church of Christ

*Mr. David Leslie, Executive Director*  
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

*Rev. Kate Lore, Social Justice Minister*  
First Unitarian Universalist Church

*Mr. Bill Russell, Executive Director*  
Union Gospel Mission

*Rev. Dr. David Wheeler, Senior Pastor*  
First Baptist Church

*Rev. Dr. William Sinkford, Senior Pastor*  
First Unitarian Universalist Church