

A Position Paper from Downtown Clergy Council:

“How to Make the Influence of the Service Community Stronger than the Influence of the Streets!”

The clergy community, including churches, synagogues, and missions, involved in ministry in and around the Central City area, known as Skid Row, have come together to create this Position Paper to express concerns about some serious quality of life and recovery issues for those living in Central City. During the holiday season and throughout the year, many well-meaning individuals come down to Skid Row to feed the homeless or donate clothing in the street. Though we appreciate the intentions, it is clear after speaking with many about the issues, that they are unaware of the fallout of this activity. This document has been created to give out information designed to educate many about the problems feeding and clothing the homeless in the street can cause. Our desire is to give detailed explanations and solutions for those with a desire to help.

WHAT SKID ROW HOMELESSNESS IS:

Nationwide, we all know that homelessness is due to the economy, lack of jobs, poor education and other issues. Yet in this 50 block radius we call Skid Row, the driving force keeping many (not all) of the people you see in the streets is narcotics/alcohol addiction. For this reason, there are service providers in the area that have programs designed to assist them with beating their addictions and reintegrating into a healthy lifestyle. Many refuse to utilize these services. So long as it is easier to live on the street than it is to face making changes in their behavior and lifestyle many will continue to choose the streets. Unfortunately many well meaning individuals come to skid row and believing they are helping hungry hurting people actually *enable* them to stay on the streets rather than take steps to toward a change for the better.

What is available to the homeless people in Skid Row?

- There are four major missions that serve up to 8,000 meals a day, three times a day to the homeless community in Skid Row with the purpose of drawing them to their services to help get them off of the streets and on their feet in a positive direction. You will not see 8,000 people in the streets of Skid Row. They also off set their hours to ensure that if someone misses a meal at one place, they can get it at another.
- There are also smaller shelters and services for them.
- Drug/Alcohol programs to help guide them to sobriety.
- Spiritual or personal guidance through faith based and non-faith based programs.
- Job Training programs to help them become productive members of society
- Food/Clothing is designed to help draw them to services.

If you look deeper, you will find that it is impossible to go hungry in Skid Row. In fact, a homeless person within the Skid Row boundaries eats better than a poor child in South LA with

a home. You will not see one hungry or naked person in the area unless they are under the influence of drugs, mental illness or both.

Reasons many homeless people give you for not utilizing the missions or service organizations:

- **Many individuals will tell you that they do not want to hear a sermon to eat a meal.** The truth is that there are faith based and non-faith based organizations in Skid Row that do not, and will not turn anyone away because of their different beliefs or lack thereof.
- **They will tell you that the lines are too long.** Yes the lines are long but they go quickly.
- **They may tell you that the mission is out of food.** As I stated before, all four missions are equipped to serve 8,000 people. The missions also off set their hours, so that if a person misses a meal at one location, he/she can go to another one right around the corner.
- **They may tell you that the food is not good.** That is false as well. The missions cook their food to the highest standards. The kitchens are regularly inspected by the health department and most of them have higher ratings than many of the restaurants you the public frequent. They meet all regulations, which minimize the chance of anyone getting sick unlike the results of some street feedings.

The real reason why many of the homeless people in Skid Row would rather eat in the street:

- **They want to be close to where their vices are.** As we stated before, the driving force keeping many people in the streets of Skid Row is their various addictions. When you feed them in the street, you unintentionally rob them of any incentive to change and cause them to eat in a filthy environment, which many of them contribute to as they eat what they like, and throw the rest into the street. This is why you see the unhealthy conditions that the homeless in Skid Row live in.
- **Many of them have removed order and structure from their lives for a long time, and as a result, they now live in the street.** The missions provide order, structure and a clean environment for them to eat in.
- **You must understand that when you feed the homeless in the street, you unintentionally rob them of any incentive to seek assistance from the various services in the area.**

What is the fallout from feeding and clothing homeless people in the street?

- Since addiction is the driving force keeping many anchored to the streets, many of the people (not all) will take the items you give them and sell the items to make enough money to buy their narcotics. The clothing that is not used is either thrown into the street or used as toilet paper, which is also left in the street.
- The food left behind that they did not want is thrown in the street, causing infestations of insects and rodents.
- Environmental issues increase stemming from the waste. Those that don't go to one of the service providers to eat, also don't go into those facilities to use the restrooms and the

impact of hundreds of individuals using the streets as their toilets creates an environment of filth and disease.

- These conditions show disrespect of the people who live in Skid Row. In Skid Row there are people who live in low income supportive housing who are actually trying to rehabilitate. This is their community, and when it continues to look like a dumping ground, it affects them. You must ask yourself if you would like to see this happen in your community.
- Crime is also a factor as many people fight over the overabundance of clothes of steal from each other.
- The excess clothing many times becomes collected by Skid Row sidewalk hoarders who pile the items on the sidewalk causing blockage for pedestrian traffic and wheelchair access for the handicapped of Skid Row.
- The most negative affect is that it creates a mentality with many homeless individuals that they do not have to change their lives when they are getting everything they want and need in the street.
- The level of waste causes those who live outside of Skid Row to see it as a city dump, and they will come and dump furniture, and other unwanted items in the street where hoarders gather the items until it blocks the sidewalk. These items give cover to criminals who will hide narcotics and weapons in the abandoned items to conceal them from police, thus furthering the criminality that causes overdosing, illness and violent crime. Sadly good intentions may be the cause of someone's demise in Skid Row.

RESPONSIBLE WAYS TO HELP THE HOMELESS:

We don't want to talk about negative issues without providing positive solutions. It is in no way shape or form our desire to tell you not to help those in need. What we are asking is that you do it in the most effective and responsible way. Here are some suggestions that can help you assist the homeless in a manner that de-incentivizes the streets and guides the homeless in Skid Row to the proper resources.

- **Instead of food bring hygiene kits** - Many homeless individuals in Skid Row will stop taking care of themselves physically as their addictions become the center of their lives. Others struggle with mental illness and are shelter resistant. Providing them with baggies containing soap, deodorant, Band-Aids, hand sanitizer, sanitary napkins, shaving products, lotion, and shampoo, has encouraged many individuals to take care of themselves hygienically, and has led them to services. We almost never see these items discarded or sold.
- **Bring bottled water** – Bottled water in the summer months is highly recommended as many people in Skid Row become dehydrated as they binge and crash on the sidewalks. These items are never thrown away because the homeless recycle them.
- **Work with the area Missions** - I clearly understand that many people want to be a part of helping the homeless through their own hands. Yet the fact remains that you will be more effective in changing people's lives in the long term, if you work with the area missions to serve the homeless. In this manner, you will be assisting the missions in guiding people to services. The directors of each of the missions in this sector have expressed that they will open their arms for you to serve food, or donate clothing.

- **Engage in street cleanings** - It is highly encouraged that you show support for this community. Many residents of Skid Row see where they live as a community just as you do where you live. You can help them in their healing process through coming down to Skid Row with brooms and trash bags, and cleaning up this area. When the quality of life in Skid Row is uplifted, so are the hearts minds and souls of those who are working hard to obtain sobriety and stability, which gives you more ears that are apt to hear your messages of hope.
- **Donating money to the area shelters** – In these tough economic times, the area missions are struggling to operate. These services are desperately needed in this area.
- **Outside of Skid Row** – Mobilize your group to find families outside of Skid Row who are struggling during these tough economic times. There is a family out there who would truly appreciate your assistance with food, school clothes for kids, or other items that will not go to waste because they are actually needed. A homeless person in the Skid Row area eats better than a poor child living in poverty with a roof over their heads. There are countless families outside of Skid Row who could use shoes, school clothes, diapers and food that can sustain them throughout the year. Your organization may want to identify a motel or other low rent area manager who could alert you to families with special needs. It is also sometimes possible to adopt families in need through your local school counselors.

In closing, please remember that we are not trying to tell you to stop doing your good works; we are urging you to do it in a way that creates an environment conducive for change for the wonderful people of Skid Row whom we have the honor of serving. We have seen many lives changed through responsible efforts to assist them. **In closing, ask yourself if what if what we are saying makes sense. If it does, please work with us in assisting the homeless in a responsible manner.**

Sincerely,

The Downtown Clergy Council

Kevin Haah

President of Downtown Clergy Council and Lead Pastor of New City Church of LA

A Partial List of Endorsers of this Position Paper:

Kevin Haah, Lead Pastor of New City Church of Los Angeles and President of Downtown Clergy Council (kevin@newcitychurchla.com)

Andy Bale, CEO of Union Rescue Mission (abales@urm.org)

Herb Smith, President/CEO of Los Angeles Mission (hsmith@lamission.net)

Tina Babcock, CEO of Restoration and Recovery Resources Group (former President of Downtown Clergy Council) (tina@acadc.org)

Gus Catipon, Our Lady of Angels

Jesse Ross, Lead Pastor of Live Church LA

Rabbi Moshe Greenwald, *Director*, Jewish Community Center, Chabad of Downtown Los Angeles

Alex Choi, Lead Pastor of Sovereign Grace Church

Sandie Richards, Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Los Angeles
Timothy Yee, Senior Pastor of Union Church
Dennis Kang, Lead Pastor of City Light Church
Angela de Los Santos, Weingard Center
Bowen Park, Director of Love LA, Young Nak Celebration Church