



HOUSING
ALLIANCE
DELAWARE

**FAITH AND
HOUSING**
JUSTICE WEEKEND



JOIN ALL OF DELAWARE'S FAITH
COMMUNITY AND STAND FOR JUSTICE

Make Your Voice Heard

As people of faith, we are taught to live our faith into our daily life, to walk our ethics and morals into our mundane life, to infuse every mundane decision with a spiritual intent. What can be more mundane than where we sleep at night, the shower we take for granted, or the food in our pantry?

In the month of June 2023 alone, over 1273 households contacted Housing Alliance's Centralized Intake program because they were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. 36% of households who called were unsheltered the night before they called. (Meaning they slept outside, in a car, in an encampment, or on the street). In other words, 458 households in the month of June did not have a bed of their own to sleep in, a shower to use every day, or a pantry to put food into. Thousands more are facing the threat eviction, sleeping on a friend's couch, or doubling up temporarily in the home of a friend or family member.

In the same month of June 2023, 63% of households who contacted Centralized Intake for help were Black headed households. Housing justice is Racial Justice.

According to the Department of Education during the School Year 2021-2022, 3,477 school aged children in Delaware were homeless or unhoused. As a society we are creating generational trauma by not systematically addressing our housing crisis.

As people of faith, we are taught to take care of those who are disenfranchised. And for many of us we do that when we give to the clothing and/or food drives, when we volunteer at code purple. All worthy endeavors. As people of faith, we know how to give people fish. Now we must learn how to give people fish and teach them how to fish at the same time. It is a lot easier to learn how to fish when you are not hungry.

The weekend of November 17-19, 2023, faith communities across the state will be learning, and praying about housing instability and homelessness. Please join us! Your faith is invaluable! Your voice can change lives.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Reverend Amy Yarnall, Fritz Jones, Irfan Patel, and Gaynell Loder for their writing capability, spiritual essence, and commitment to walking their faith into their everyday life. In addition, I could not have embarked on such an enterprise without the support of Rachel Stucker; the editing capabilities of Wes Wootten and Rabbi Peter Grumbacher and the educational expertise of Rabbi Ilyse Kramer. Thank you to everyone!

If you have ideas for upcoming year, please feel free to contact me. I would love to work with you!

Rabbi Sonya Starr

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1) List of Possible Events (Please do not limit your event to only these ideas; these are here to spurn your creativity!)

Sermon and/or educational event for adults, teens, and/or family education

Cardboard City: Have people build a shelter out of cardboard boxes. Discuss what it would be like to sleep in one or invite people to spend the night in their shelter.

Have every teen bring in 1–5-minute video of someone they found who is homeless or has been evicted...have each teen share what they found, what they learned from it, and how they felt when they listened to it.

Family education: if you had to leave home in two days and could only bring five things what would you bring? Connect to the Noah or Exodus story.

Collection plates (money and/or clothes and/or toiletries and/or gift cards and/or food)

Guest speakers: Invite experts and/or people with lived experience to speak.

Storytelling

Interfaith dialogue: Consider lifting the voice of another tradition to augment your own tradition's voice or partnering with another faith community to do a joint program.

Start a book club discussion (Eviction, Color of Law etc...)

Movie Night (The Maid, etc...) followed by a discussion

Volunteer in a shelter

If you are interested in focusing on one of the following topics, you might look at the following texts:

Eviction: 37, 54

Homelessness: 1, 4, 25, 34, 35, 37, 39,44, 56

Poverty: 22, 36, 37, 41, 57

Helping others: 8, 18, 21, 30, 38, 40, 49, 60

Politics from a religious point of view: 6, 7, 8

Justice: 14, 64, 69

Participation Form: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DRGVDR8> (Please fill out this form by November 17, 2022)

Housing & Homelessness Facts

- ✓ According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, housing is one of the 7 vital conditions for health and wellbeing.
- ✓ Delaware is short over 21,000 rental homes for extremely low-income renters (childcare workers, janitors, poultry industry workers, waiters/waitresses, cashiers, home aide staff)
- ✓ 77% of extremely low-income renter households are severely cost burdened. (Spending 50% or more on their housing and utilities)
- ✓ 43% of all extremely low-income renter households are in the labor force, 26% are elderly, 19% are disabled.

	Below 30% AMI	Below 50% AMI	Below 80%AMI	Below 100% AMI
Available units/100 renters	27	58	97	101

- ✓ The DE Dept of Labor estimates that 55,000 workers in DE earn min. wage. To be able to afford a modest 1bdrm apt, a min. wage worker would have to work 71 hours/week.
- ✓ In New Castle one needs to earn \$58,800 to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market value. In Kent the number is \$47,280, In Sussex the number is \$44,240.
- ✓ The 2023 Point in Time Count showed that there was an increase in the number of people who are unsheltered (someone who is unsheltered is living in an encampment, car, shelter or on the streets) by 28%.
- ✓ In the school year 2020-2021, 2,576 children were homeless and unhoused: 265 were unaccompanied homeless youth; 839 were children with disabilities; 224 were children with limited English proficiency.
- ✓ Of those 2,576 children 72.94% were doubled up; 21.23% lived in hotels/motels; 4.77% in shelters, transitional housing and 1.05% were unsheltered (cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailer, or abandoned building).



As children we played musical chairs. As a society, we are forcing people to play “musical chairs” with housing each day. When the music stops, are you lucky enough to have a roof over your head?

Resources

A. Interfaith Prayers

1. Interfaith Prayer I

Dear God,
Watch over your children,
Especially those with no home to return to at the end of long and weary days.
Protect them from all harm and keep them from despair.
Open the hearts and eyes of those of us with blessings to share.
Unite our voices in a call for justice;
So that no man need ever lay down for the night on a wooden park bench because he has no home;
That no woman need ever tuck her children into the backseat of her car because she has no home.
So that no child will ever wonder, "Where will I feel safe?" because he has no home;
So that all those who wander, and all who are in need, find the shelter and the peace they seek.
Remind us, O God, that we cannot rest fully secure in our homes each night until all your children are, at last, home. Amen.

2. A Prayer for the Homeless

Bless the homeless, this day and every day,
Keep them from physical and emotional harm.
Fill their hearts with hope for the future and for today,
Comfort the homeless as they walk their difficult paths,
May I know that anyone, even me, can be homeless.
Bless the homeless with enough food to sustain them,
With enough warmth to shield them from the elements,
With the power to wrestle personal demons and win,
With the will to go on and build their lives again.
May hope touch each homeless heart, spirit & life,
Let the kindness of others bring lasting benefits,
Bring freedom from addiction, illness and misery,
Open their humanity to include & embrace themselves.
Bless the homeless with self-acceptance and love,
Spark their imaginations with belief in the future,
Bringing the possibility of a better life,
A safer life and a more secure life.
Amen.

3. A Litany for Homeless People

Hear our prayer today for all women and men, boys and girls who are homeless this day.
Spirit of love, we pray for all your people.

For those sleeping under bridges, on park benches, in doorways or bus stations.
Spirit of mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who can only find shelter for the night but must wander in the daytime.
Spirit of love, be their guide.

For families broken because they could not afford to pay the rent.
Spirit of love, hear our prayer.

For those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in.
Spirit of compassion, hear our prayer.

For those who have no place to keep possessions that remind them who they are.
Spirit of love, hear our prayer.

For those who have been betrayed by the social safety net.
Spirit of love, hear our prayer.

For all those people, we pray that you will provide shelter, security and hope.
Spirit of love, hear our prayer.

We pray for those of us who have warm houses and comfortable beds that we not be lulled
into complacency and forgetfulness.
Spirit of love, open our hearts that we may respond by sharing unselfishly.

Help us to see your face in the eyes of every homeless person we meet so that we may be
empowered, through word and deed, and through the political means, to bring justice and
peace to those who are homeless.
Amen.

4. Prayer from person on the street

Time to lay me down to sleep,
Stone cold pillow, Cardboard sheet
Blanket falling from the sky
Will I be missed if I should die?

5. Poem on Compassion

A love like no other
A way to connect,
Connect with another
A way to bring light,
When darkness has reign,
And show a way out,
Of suffering and pain,
A skill of the heart,
That lets the heart glow
Keeping it open
Through torment and woe.

B. Hebrew Bible: Not connected to the liturgical calendar. (See Below for Liturgical Readings. To Find the Hebrew texts in both Hebrew and English look <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/415302?lang=bi>)

6. Genesis 41:39-44

(39) So, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. (40) You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." (41) Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." (42) And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. (43) He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, "Abrek!" Thus, he placed him over all the land of Egypt. (44) Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

A) Pharaoh said to Joseph that he was in charge of the Pharaoh's land. What does it mean to be in charge of the land?

B) How do we balance our responsibility to ourselves, our bosses (the Pharaoh) and those whom we have authority over?

7. [Genesis 47:13-25](#)

(13) Now there was no bread in all the world, for the famine was very severe; both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. (14) Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace. (15) And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!" (16) And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone." (17) So, they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their livestock. (18) And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland. (19) Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste." (20) So, Joseph gained possession of all the farmland of Egypt for Pharaoh, all the Egyptians having sold their fields because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh. (21) And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other. (22) Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore, they did not sell their land. (23) Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. (24) And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as nourishment for your children." (25) And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be serfs to Pharaoh."

A) Assuming that Joseph was charging fair market value, is it ethical/good business/both to force people to give everything up to eat during a famine?

B) How much is fair game to ask of someone in crisis like a famine or living in a car?

C) Is the final agreement Joseph made in verse twenty-four, similar to income taxes or more like sharecropping? Who should be able to build equity from the land?

8. [Deuteronomy 15:7-11](#)

(7) If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. (8) Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need. (9) Beware lest you harbor the base thought, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,” so that you are mean and give nothing to your needy kin—who will cry out to God against you, and you will incur guilt. (10) Give readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. (11) For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kin in your land.

- A) We are told in Deuteronomy, not to harden our heart or close our hand to the needy, how do you balance the needs of so many people with your own needs?
- B) Is it the individual/community/government’s heart and hand the author of Deuteronomy. Is referring to ours?
- C) Is there a difference between opening your hand, opening your door, the doors of your neighborhood? What if opening all of these entry ways will harm you like lowering your property value or creating a parking jam?
- D) How do you prevent yourself from feeling discouraged when you know there will always be more people to help?

9. [Isaiah 58:6-7](#)

(6) No, this is the fast I desire:
To unlock fetters of wickedness,
And untie the cords of the yoke^a
To let the oppressed go free;
To break off every yoke. (7) It is to share your bread with the hungry,
And to take the wretched poor into your home;
When you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to ignore your own kin.

- A) Isaiah tells us to set the poor free. What responsibility do we have for the poor after we set them free?
- B) Isaiah tells us to take the poor into our home. Is letting the poor into your home the same as providing permanent safe and affordable housing for the poor?
- C) Isaiah stresses that we are not to ignore our own kin. Is it ok to ignore people who are not our kin?

10. Ruth 1:16

(16) But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

- A) Ruth declares that she will lodge where Naomi lodges. If you had to declare your loyalty to another person from another generation (a parent or child) would lodging where they lodge be part of it?
- B) What does Ruth promising to lodge where Naomi lodges symbolize?

11. Ruth 3:1

(1) Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy.

- A) Naomi not only promises Ruth a home but a home where she will be happy. Is it our responsibility to provide housing for low-income people where they will be happy or is it enough to provide housing?

C. Baha’i

12. *Turning Point for All Nations, A statement of the Baha’i International Community to UN, 1995*

“The body of humankind is one and indivisible. Each member of the human race is born into the world as a Trust of the whole. This relationship between the individual and the collective constitutes the moral foundation human rights movements are calling for. The purpose of governance is to establish and preserve the rights of all individuals”

13. *Promulgation of Universal Peace, Baha’i Faith*

“Material civilization has reached an advanced plane, but now there is a need of Spiritual civilization. Material civilization alone will not satisfy, it cannot meet the conditions and requirements of the present age, its benefits are limited to the World of matter. There is no limitation to the spirit of man, for spirit in itself is Progressive.”

14. Baha'i Writings I

“Justice is the faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. It enables one to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group.”

Reflecting on the above quotes, has society's emphasis on material progress diminished the quest for justice for all individuals? Reflect on the injustice that across America there is an acute shortage of affordable subsidized housing and affordable workforce housing for people in lower paying jobs. The State of Delaware is no exception to this problem. Government has failed its people. There is a need for people of faith to demand a seat at the table to begin a conversation about value-based progress. This conversation needs to be on both the policy level and the grassroots level.

According to the Biden School of Public Policy, Delaware has had one of the highest rental increases in the nation. Even before the stresses of the pandemic, to afford a one-bedroom rental an income of \$42,000.00 is needed. The median income for Delawareans is \$36,000.00. Not just the poor, but minimum wage workers and those just entering the working world are unable to find affordable housing. Every County in Delaware has an affordable housing shortage. Sussex County, with a rapidly growing population, is most in need with a shortage of 20,000 affordable houses. Recently the News Journal (8/25/22) reported that restaurant owners at Delaware beaches, in need of more help, realize there is little affordable housing available to attract new employees. Several owners have begun advocating for affordable housing. Stable communities and a growing economy require affordable housing.

15. Baha'i Writings II

“Man is the Supreme Talisman, lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”

16. Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Faith I

“O Children of Men!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from the same substance, it is incumbent on you to be even as one Soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be manifest.”

Referring to the above quotes, should education be viewed not only in material knowledge, but in moral development as well? If every man is born possessing gems of value, would a value-based education be a good investment in bringing forth one's potential? Would a moral component to education establish a foundation for stability and progress based on a rectitude

of conduct that would promote altruism, service to humanity, seeing work as meaningful and respect for the rights of others? In the following examples, how could a value-based education have helped people respond more positively to the building of affordable housing.

In 2008, Middletown, DE was experiencing a housing boom driven by developers. In Town Hall meetings the suggestion to include an affordable housing plan was met with angry “not in my backyard” shouts. In 2012, HUD and the US Justice Department sued the Sussex County Council because they wouldn’t allow a Housing Trust Fund Project to build a 50-lot affordable housing subdivision.

Katie Millard, Sussex Habitat for Humanity, reported to the Biden School of Public Policy panel discussion, that Habitat has paused building new houses to focus on an education campaign to raise people’s awareness of the importance of affordable housing. There is a great need for education about housing at the grassroots level. Housing is a basic right, not a privilege. It is the basis of creating stability in a community. Education allows us to evaluate our prejudices, define justice and fairness and seek truth.

17. Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah, Baha’i Faith II

“The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.”

18. Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah, Baha’i Faith III

“O Children of Dust!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighings of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the paths of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine. Well is it with him that adornest himself with My Virtues”

How can people of faith help build a just community across lines of racial and economic differences? The drive to create just societies has been one of the fundamental forces in history. The absence of justice dismantles the cohesive social fabric causing it to fracture into discord and chaos. Laws, alone, cannot solve the problem of poverty or affordable housing or the growing gap between the haves and the have nots. Just as the Black Lives Matter and Me-Too movements have attained the national level of conversation, so should we help raise awareness of the critical need for affordable housing. Let’s talk about an equitable distribution of wealth; a transition from need to solidarity, from prejudice to empathy and kindness, from indifference to radical love for humankind. Let’s talk about justice as the one power that can create a collective will to guide interactions and decision making.

19. Statement of Baha'i International community to UN, 1995

“Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity’s oneness into a collective will to view progress as acknowledging the interests of the individual and those of society as inextricably linked and become the guiding concern of human interactions and decision making. Justice is the thread that must be woven into the consideration of every interaction, whether in the family, the neighborhood, the state or the nation.”

D. Buddhist

20. Buddhist Texts: Wanderer

Wanderer, the road is your footsteps, nothing else;
Wander, there is no path,
You lay down a path in walking. In walking, you lay down a path and when turning around You see the road you’ll never step on again. Wanderer, path there is none,
Only tracks on the ocean foam.

21. The Buddha

“However many holy words you read, however many you speak, what good will they do you if you do not act upon them?”

22. Nta Sutta

In the *Kutada*, the Buddha suggested economic development instead of force to reduce crime. The government should use the country’s resources to improve the economic conditions of the country. It could embark on agricultural and rural development, provide financial support to entrepreneurs and business, provide adequate wages for workers to maintain a decent life with human dignity.

E. Christian: Protestant and Catholic

23. Prayer I

Lord God,
You came to give honor to the least, those forgotten, overlooked and misjudged.
You came to give first place to the least of these, those left behind, misunderstood and undervalued.
You came to give a warm welcome to the lost, those who are orphaned, abandoned and destitute.
Help us to be your ears to listen to their cries.
Help us to be your voice speaking out love and acceptance.
Help us to be feet walking beside those in need.

Help us to be your hands to clothe, feed and shelter them.
You came for the least, the lost and last of this world.
Lord, hear our prayer.
Amen.

24. Resources edited by Amy Yarnall, based upon Feasting on the Word: Liturgies for Year A, Vol. 1, Kimberly Bracken Long, editor: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013

OPENING WORDS / CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Christ, the One who was, and is, and is to come, welcomes you to this place.

People: As one body, with one voice, we honor and glorify the giver of wisdom, counsel, knowledge, and joy.

Leader: You came to give honor to the least, those forgotten, overlooked and misjudged.

People: You came to give first place to the least of these, those left behind, misunderstood and undervalued.

Leader: You came to give a warm welcome to the lost, those who are orphaned, abandoned and unhoused.

People: Help us to be your ears to listen to their cries. Help us to be your voice speaking out love and acceptance. Help us to be feet walking beside those in need. Help us to be your hands to clothe, feed and shelter them.

Leader: Let us worship God here in this sanctuary

People: Empower us by your Spirit to continue to worship you each day through acts of love, service and justice.

25. Prayer of the Day

O Root of Jesse, O Peace, stir up your power and expectation within us. In this time we await the fulfillment of your eternal presence in creation. As a people who know what it is to be displaced and yearn for a place of belonging and love, we pray for those who have no home. Use us to seek safety for all people, for we know we are called not only to provide shelter for the unhoused, but also to build community. Grant us the wisdom and courage to act so that no person feels displaced or discarded, for you live and reign among us, Maker, Savior, and Giver of Life, one God, now and forever. Amen.

26. Prayers of Intercession

Source: Feasting on the Word: Liturgies for Year A, Vol. 1, Kimberly Bracken Long, editor: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013

Let us pray to the Lord, saying,
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We come to you this day, O God,
with a deepening anticipation of your birth among us.
We thank you for the gift of your love.
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We pray for the church throughout the world,
and for all the ministries that build up the body of Christ,
that in our many vocations we may serve to your glory.
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We pray for this nation and for all nations,
remembering especially those who are victims of political and social injustice.
We pray for elected officials and all leaders,
that they will govern with courage and equity.
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We pray for all in need: for the sick, the destitute, and the dying;
for strangers in our land, for the invisible ones;
for the elderly and children; for parents and grandparents;
for those who live alone and those who live lonely in the midst of family.
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We remember with mercy those who sleep without shelter,
cold and vulnerable, lacking enough food;
those who are overworked and those who have no work.
Stir up in us the capacity to see ourselves in their struggles
and to act so that others may have life abundant.
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We pray for this community, for our neighbors and friends,
and for those with whom we study and work.
Guide and strengthen all people in our common life
to know the gifts of your grace and love.
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

For what else does this assembly pray on this day?
[Let there be silence for a time when individuals might offer up petitions. At the end, say,]
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

May all that we ask and all that you see is needed in our world, be given to your people;
through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

27. Invitation to the Offering

We bear fruit worthy of our repentance when we give our tithes and offerings for the well-being of the poor.

28. Prayer of Thanksgiving/Dedication

We give you thanks, Holy One, for all good things: for this universe and for Earth itself, for creatures and plants, for water and food, for light and darkness; for Jesus, our brother, who had nowhere to lay his head, who enlarged our vision, setting himself before us as the bread and wine of abundant life; and for the Holy Spirit, who comes to us in baptism and moves in our midst with the power to lead us to you. Turn our offerings to your good will, and turn us always to you in gratitude. Amen.

29. Benediction by Amy Yarnall

Go forth in peace. Remember that we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make the journey with us. So be swift to love. Make haste to be kind. And may the grace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, empower you to serve God and your neighbor in all that you do.

December 11, 2022 Advent 3A

Isaiah 35: 1-10; Luke 1:46-55; James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11: 2-11

30. Isaiah 35: 1-10 NRSV

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with

singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

- A) How do you define “unclean”? How do you think of this term? Who falls in this category?
- B) Are those who are not “saved” unclean?
- C) In Jewish tradition, unclean is a temporary condition. For example, if you are contagious, you are temporarily unclean. It also refers to “missing the mark.” There almost always is a way to be cleansed.
- D) During Advent, we are reminded that God prepares the way: “Behold, your God is coming.... God’s graciousness and generosity are expressed to all of creation. God has not given up on God’s original purpose for creation.¹” What is God’s purpose for creation? How is ensuring all of creation is well cared for, including housing, food, etc., a part of God’s purpose? How do we participate in God’s purposes?

31. Luke 1:46-55 NRSV

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

- A) Mary sings this song. Who does she proclaim God especially cares for?
- B) Where do you see yourself in the picture Mary portrays in verses 51-54?
- C) Considering the circumstances of Jesus’ birth, how might Mary and Joseph understand affordable housing?
- D) How do our values relate to our public policy?
- E) If Mary’s song were to guide our stewardship both as we practice it in our own lives, and how we practice it publicly as a community and in public policy, what would it look like?

32. James 5:7–10 NRSV

7 Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

- A) How do people grumble against one another?
- B) Can you think of ways that we blame the poor for their poverty, and judge them for being poor? How does that judgement impact our policies on people in need in general and affordable housing in particular?
- C) What is the relationship between advocacy that takes years or decades to come fruition and “an example of suffering and patience?”
- D) How do you address feeling discouraged, knowing there will always be more people to help?
- E) How do we practice patience, how do we strengthen our hearts, avoid grumbling against one another, so that we may not be judged?

33. Matthew 11: 2-11 NRSV

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” 4 Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

- A) *“the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”* How do you react to this definition of John’s evidence?
- B) If Mary sung this song today, who do you think she would name as the blind, the lame, and the lepers of modern times? How comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel around people in need?
- C) What role do we have in God’s Kingdom in relation to John’s description in verse 5?
- D) How does capitalism figure into the Kingdom of God?
- E) What is the role of the individual? The community? Government policy?
- F) Who is the messenger who will prepare your way before you? What is our role in preparation?

34. Theologian Walter Bruggemann

“The Bible itself is primarily concerned with the issue of being displaced and yearning for a place.” What we must seek for all people is safe, sanitary, and affordable housing. The church is called to not only seek to provide shelter, but we must do more than house the homeless, we must build community. Home as a promise to the homeless must be the ongoing commitment of the church. In the most materially rich nation in the world, the homeless are all around us. They are the lonely who pass their time talking to themselves in every big city and small town in the nation. They are rural families without the economic means to travel long distances to shelters and other public services. The homeless are people who have been displaced and discarded. Their numbers alone make them a nation of strangers, highly mobile and rootless, surrounded by wealth, glamor and excess of all of that which they so desperately lack.”

35. Reading by Pope Francis

“The Son of God came into this world as a homeless person. The Son of God knew what it was to start life without a roof over his head. We can find no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing. There are many unjust situations, but we know that God is suffering with us, experiencing them at our side. He does not abandon us. We know that Jesus wanted to show solidarity with every person. He wanted everyone to experience his companionship, his help, his love. He identified with all those who suffer, who weep, who suffer any kind of injustice. We can imagine what Joseph must have been thinking. How is it that the Son of God has no home? Why are we homeless, why don't we have housing? Saint Joseph's simple questions echo in the minds of those who serve the poor even today. Like Saint Joseph, you may ask: Why are we homeless, without a place to live? ...Why do these, our brothers and

sisters, have no place to live? Why are these brothers and sisters of ours homeless? These are questions which all of us might well ask. Saint Joseph never hesitated to ask questions in the face of injustice and suffering, the Pope said. But what set Saint Joseph apart was his faith in God, which gave him "the power to find light just at the moment when everything seemed dark." Faith sustained him amid the troubles of life. Thanks to faith, Joseph was able to press forward when everything seemed to be holding him back. In the same way, faith can sustain the poor and give meaning to suffering. In the face of unjust and painful situations, faith brings us the light which scatters the darkness. As it did for Joseph, faith makes us open to the quiet presence of God at every moment of our lives, in every person and in every situation. God is present in every one of you, in each one of us. Faith makes us know that God is at our side, that God is in our midst and his presence spurs us to charity. Charity is born of the call of a God who continues to knock on our door, the door of all people, to invite us to love, to compassion, to service of one another. Prayer unites us; it makes us brothers and sisters. It opens our hearts and reminds us of a beautiful truth which we sometimes forget. In prayer, we all learn to say "Father", "Dad". We learn to see one another as brothers and sisters. In prayer, there are no rich and poor people, there are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers. In prayer, there is no first or second class, there is brotherhood.

36. Matthew 25:34-40

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothed you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply ‘Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

37. Catholic Response

Affordable Housing and Homelessness

"The lack of safe, affordable housing requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations."

--USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2011

For more information and program ideas see:

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/domestic-justice-and-human-development/affordable-housing-and-homelessness>

F. Indigenous Traditions/Earth Based Spiritualities

38. American Indigenous Grandfather Sacred One, teach us love, compassion and honor, that we Peoples may heal the earth and heal each other.

G. Islam

39. Alhamdulillah (Thanks to Allah) for everything

O Lord, grant the homeless and the refugees of the world warmth and peace
Oh Lord, have mercy on homeless people who will be the hardest hit during extreme seasons
Amen!

40. Quran 2:177

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but (true) righteousness is (in) one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask (for help), and for freeing slaves; (and who) establishes prayer and gives zakah; (those who) fulfill their promise when they promise; and (those who) are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous.

41. Quran 2:178

‘..... truly righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day..... and spends his money for love of Him, on the kindred and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and those who ask for charity....’

42. Quran 3:130

“O you who have believed, do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied, but fear God that you may be successful.”

43. Quran 4:8

“And when (other) relatives and orphans and the needy are present at the (time of) division, then provide for them (something) out of the estate and speak to them words of appropriate kindness.”

44. Quran 4:36

Be generous to the needy wayfarer, the homeless son of the street, and the one who reaches you in a destitute condition.

45. Quran 17:26-27

Give to the near of kin his due, and to the needy and the wayfarers. Do not squander your wealth wastefully; for those who squander wastefully are Satan's brothers, and Satan is every ungrateful to his Lord.

46. Quran 90:13-17

And what should make thee know what the ascent is? It is the freeing of a slave. Or feeding in a day of hunger. An orphan near of kin, or a poor man lying in the dust.'

47. From the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH - Peace and Blessings be Upon Him)

"Pay Zakat out of your property, for truly it is a purifier which purifies you, and be kind to your relatives, and acknowledge the rights of the poor, neighbors and beggars."

"Your servants/workers are your brothers whom God the most High has placed under your authority. Therefore, a person who had a brother under his authority, should feed him out of that which he eats himself; he should not assign work to him, which is beyond his capacity, and if you do so, then help him in his work."

"If anyone would like God to save him from the hardships of the Day of Resurrection, he should give more time to his debtor who is short of money or remit his debt altogether."

H. Jewish

48. Prayer for Homeless Persons Memorial Day By [Rabbi Brant Rosen](#)

El male rakhamim shokhen bam'romim
ha'metzei menukha nekhonah
takhat kanfei ha'shekhinah
God filled with compassion,
whose loving presence ever surrounds us
bring perfect rest to all who have died unhoused
those who have died on the streets, in tent cities
public parks and under viaducts.
Protect these precious souls
with the shelter they were denied in their lifetimes
gather them under the softness of your wings
show them love, bring them home.
Remind us that no one
is forgotten in your sight
that all are welcome at your table
that each and every one of their lives
is a story of sacred worth and meaning
that can never be lost.
May the memories of their lives
shine forth like the brilliance
of the skies above
as we rededicate ourselves
to their memories now.
Turn our grief and anger into resolve
fill us with strength and will and purpose
that we may once and for all
end this endless night.
Never let us forget
our sacred responsibility
to ensure that all are housed
and clothed and fed;
let us never stop fighting
for the basic essential dignity
of every living, breathing soul.
Ba'al ha'rakhamim tastireihem
b'seter kanfekha le'olamim.

Source of all compassion,
inspire us to extend your shelter
across this land and throughout the world
that all may know the blessings
of safety and security now and forever.
V'nomar, and let us say,
Amen.

49. Mishkan Tefillah pp. 31

May the One whose spirit is with us in every righteous deed,
Be with all who work for the good of humanity
And bear the burdens of others
And who give bread to the hungry,
Who clothe the naked,
And take the friendless into their homes.
[And provide shelter for those in need.]
May the work of their hands endure,
And may the seed they sow bring abundant harvest.

50. Torah Reading for the week: Genesis 32:4-36:43

- A) Jacob is offered to live with Esau, to live with Hamor and Shechem, he refuses. Why is it so important for him to live in his own land?
- B) When God appears to Jacob to change his name, the second thing God promises Israel is that 'The land that I assigned to Abraham, and Isaac I assign to you?' Why is having land so important to Jacob? Is it to you? If so, why? If not, why not?
- C) Based on Jacob's last encounter with Esau, why would he think he has to fortify himself against Esau? Is his fortification based on out-of-date information, unexplained fear, projection, or legitimate caution? If we do not have enough information to answer the above question, what more would we need?
- D) How do we fortify ourselves from people who are homeless or housing instable? Do we need to?

51. Haftorah Reading for the week: Obadiah 1:1-21

- A) In Hebrew, one can say Jacob's descendants or Jacob's family, or one can say the household of Jacob? What does the household of Jacob imply that the rest does not?
- B) This haftorah mentions the household of Jacob. Who might be included in this household? Is it about the house, the land, or the people?

52. Ramban on Genesis 33:17:1

(1) AND HE BUILT FOR HIMSELF A HOUSE. It is possible that the place was a location which had no city, and he therefore found it necessary to build for himself a house and make booths for his cattle. Or it may be that the expression, *and he built for himself a house*, means that he built for himself a large house with a strong tower to fortify himself against Esau.

Rabbinic Literature

53. Mishnah Bava Metzia 8:6

(6) In the case of **one who rents out a house** in a town **to another in the rainy season**, the owner **cannot evict** the renter from the house **from the festival of Sukkot until Passover**. If the rental was **in the summer**, he must give **thirty days'** notice before he can evict him. **And** for a house located **in the cities [uvakerakim]**, **both in the summer and in the rainy season** he must give **twelve months'** notice. **And for shops** that he rented out, **both in towns and in cities**, he must give **twelve months'** notice. **Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says:** For a **baker's shop or a dyer's shop**, one must give **three years'** notice.

- A) Would 30 days be enough time for you to pack up your life and find a new place to live?
- B) Should a landlord be allowed to evict someone in the winter?
- C) Should a landlord be able to evict someone without cause?
- D) What is a reasonable amount of time to give someone before they must vacate their rental space?

E) Is there a difference between your house and your shop/business?

54. Mishnah Peah 8:7

(7) They may not give a poor person wandering from place to place less than a loaf worth a pundion at a time when four seahs [of wheat cost] one sela. If he spends the night [at a place], they must give him the cost of what he needs for the night. If he stays over Shabbat, they must give him enough food for three meals. He who has the money for two meals, he may not take anything from the charity dish. And if he has enough money for fourteen meals, he may not take any support from the communal fund. The communal fund is collected by two and distributed by three people.

- A) If someone is homeless, are we as an individual, community, government responsible for housing them? What if the person was angry or looked like they might have a weapon?
- B) How would temporary housing solve this homeless person's problem?
- C) Is there a limit on the number of days it is realistic for someone to ask for help? 5 days, 14 days, 30 days, 6 months?

55. Ketubot 67b

The Sages taught: Concerning **an orphan boy who has come to marry**, the community tries its utmost to provide for all of his needs. The charities **rent a house for him, arrange for him a bed and all his utensils, and thereafter they marry him a wife, as it is stated:** "But you shall surely open your hand to him, and shall surely lend him **sufficient for his deficiency in that which is deficient for him**" (Deuteronomy 15:8). With regard to the phrase "**sufficient for his deficiency,**" **this** is referring to **the house**. "**Which is deficient**"; **this** is referring to a **bed and table**. "**For him [lo]**"; **this** is referring to a **wife**. **And similarly,** the verse **states: "I will make him [lo] a helpmate for him"** (Genesis 2:18), when God created a wife for Adam.

- A) What do you think the communities' responsibility for an orphan should be? unaccompanied minor?
- B) How would you define sufficient for his/her needs?
- C) What if his/her emotional needs required a service dog or his/her intellectual needs required a tutor, or his/her economic needs required Wi-Fi, or his/her physical needs require a bed with a lift? How much are you responsible for?

56. Jerusalem Talmud Moed Katan 2:4

it is a joy for a person to dwell in his own (home).

- A) How would you feel if you are living on the couch in a friends or relatives house instead of your own?

Middle Ages Commentaries

57. Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 250:1

(1) How much is to be given to a poor man? Sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth. Thus, if he is hungry, he should be fed; if he needs clothing, he should be clothed; if he lacks household utensils, they should be purchased for him; ...If he is unmarried and he comes to take a wife, the community should find him a mate; but first they should rent him a home, prepare him a bed and furnish him with necessary household utensils, and then marry him off.

- A) According to Shulkan Arukh, what is the first thing the community should do for a person who is impoverished?
- B) According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness "**Housing First** is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. **This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues.** Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining housed and improving their life." Do you think this definition is embedded in the Shulkan Arukh text?
- C) Do you think there should be conditions before one is placed into housing?

58. Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor 10:5

(5) If a poor person asks of you [to give him something], and you do not have anything in your possession to give to him, comfort him with words. It is forbidden to speak harshly to a poor person or to raise your voice in a shout, for his heart is broken and crushed. Thus, it says in

Scripture, (Psalms 51:19) *God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart.* And it says, (Isaiah 57:15) *Reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the contrite.* And woe to anyone who shames a poor person! Woe to him! Rather, let him be like a father to him, in compassion and in words, as it is said, (Job 29:15) *I was a father to the needy.*

- A) Based on this text, how should you treat a person who is homeless when you walk by them?
- B) How do you balance your need to feel safe and someone else's to feel like a respected human being?

59. Rabbi Shelom of Karlin (18th Century)

If you want to raise a person from mud and filth, do not think it is enough to keep standing on top and reaching a helping hand down to the person. You must go all the way down yourself, down into mud and filth. Then take hold of the person with strong hands and pull the person and yourself out into the light."

- A) What is the difference between offering a hand down to someone for help and putting an oxygen mask on yourself first in an airplane crisis?
- B) Are there parallels to this metaphor and a lifeguard jumping into the pool to save a drowning person?
- C) Lily Watson wrote: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound with mine, then let us work together." How does Lily Watson's quote augment or detract from what Rabbi Shelon of Karlin teaching?

60. Seder Hasidim

If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor.

- A) How do we define "shelter for the poor"? Permanent shelter? Homeless shelter? Shelter with supportive services?
- B) Why is it the first thing we are required to do?
- C) What would we have to change in our life if we were to live by this decree?

Contemporary Sources

61. Writing from Rabbi Jill Jacobs (www.myjewishlearning.com)

“The emphasis on the houses of God in the texts should make us especially aware of the importance of housing in our community today. We know that our congregation would suffer greatly, maybe even cease to exist, if it lost its house, our synagogue. Like a community, a family is situated in a place, their home. That place is the center of the family- where they find shelter and sustenance, as well as being the gathering place for their micro-community. It is our responsibility to work towards ensuring that everyone has a home. Today, we can do this by helping to preserve the affordability of housing in our neighborhoods, so that our neighbors are not thrown out of their homes and unable to participate in the life of the community.”

62. Tamar Kamionkowski

“The other theme, ‘longing for a place to call home’ appears most prominently in the psalms that nestle our core prayers. Psalm 27, recited during the month of Elul preceding the Yamim Noraim, gives the fullest expression to this longing: “‘One thing I ask of the Lord, only that do I seek: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life....’ Similarly, Psalm 92, recited during Kabbalat Shabbat, describes the ideal life through the metaphor of a tree that is deeply rooted in the house of God. This centuries-old longing for the comfort of being in God’s presence is about that primal longing for ‘home.’ We yearn for a sense of the security, safety, and comfort that being in God’s presence might offer. These prayers remind us on a daily basis that home is not simply shelter; home is a shelter that is reliable, steady, safe, and secure.”

63. Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice

Source: Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice* (New York: UAHC Press, 1998), p. 94.

“By the Middle Ages, community responsibility encompassed every aspect of life. The Jewish community regulated market prices so that the poor could purchase food and other basic commodities at cost. Wayfarers were issued tickets, good for meals and lodging at homes of members of the community, who took turns in offering hospitality. Both these practices anticipated “meal tickets” and modern food stamp plans. Some Jewish communities even established “rent control,” directing that the poor be given housing at rates they could afford. In Lithuania, local trade barriers were relaxed for poor refugees. When poor young immigrants came from other places, the community would support them until they completed their education or learned a trade. The organization of charity became so specialized that numerous societies were established to keep pace with all the needs. Each of the following functions was assumed by a different society on behalf of the community at large: visiting the sick, burying

the dead, furnishing dowries for poor girls, providing clothing, ransoming captives, supplying maternity needs, and providing necessities for observing holidays. In addition, there were public inns for travelers, homes for the aged, orphanages, and free medical care. As early as the eleventh century, a hekdesch ("hospital") was established by the Jewish community of Cologne, primarily for poor and sick travelers. Many later medieval Jewish communities in Poland and Germany adopted this pattern. Spanish Jewish communities hired doctors to serve the entire community to ensure that health care was available to all."

- A) Please read the above contemporary texts and discuss.
- B) Why was providing housing so important to the Jewish community? Is providing housing still important to the Jewish community? only for Jews or non-Jews as well?
- C) What piece of this halachic message can we take on in the coming year?

I. Latter Day Saints

64. LDS scripture contains strongly worded warnings to those who do not take care of the poor and needy (Alma 5:55-56; Mormon 8:35-39; D & C 104:18). In the scriptures, caring for the poor is not just a question of charity; it is a question of justice. As King Benjamin explains in the Book of Mormon, nothing we have is really ours. It is given to us as a sacred trust- a stewardship- to be used for the benefit of our fellow beings.

J. Sikh

65. Sikh Fifth Guru: "No one is my enemy, nor is anyone a stranger to me."

66. Guru Granth Sahib: "The poor and the rich are both brothers. This is Lord's immutable design."

K. Unitarian Universalist

67. The First Principal: The inherent worth and dignity of every person.

68. The Second Principal: Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

69. The Sixth Principal: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.