



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

HOMELESSNESS GUIDEBOOK FOR ORTHODOX PARISHES



Table of Contents

Preface	3
Homelessness & Orthodox Christian Theology and Practice	5
Overview of Homelessness	8
Self-Assessment	10
Building a Homeless Outreach Ministry at Your Parish	11
Raising Funds for Your Ministry	12
Appendix	14

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Preface

Purpose

This guidebook is a simple resource created for parishes and Orthodox Christian faithful to better understand and respond to homelessness in their communities. The guidebook offers educational materials, best practices from Orthodox Christian and interfaith communities, and practical steps to build or grow ministry in our local communities, to increase witness to our brothers and sisters experiencing homelessness or who are home insecure (i.e those at risk of becoming homeless due to various factors such as evictions).

History and Context

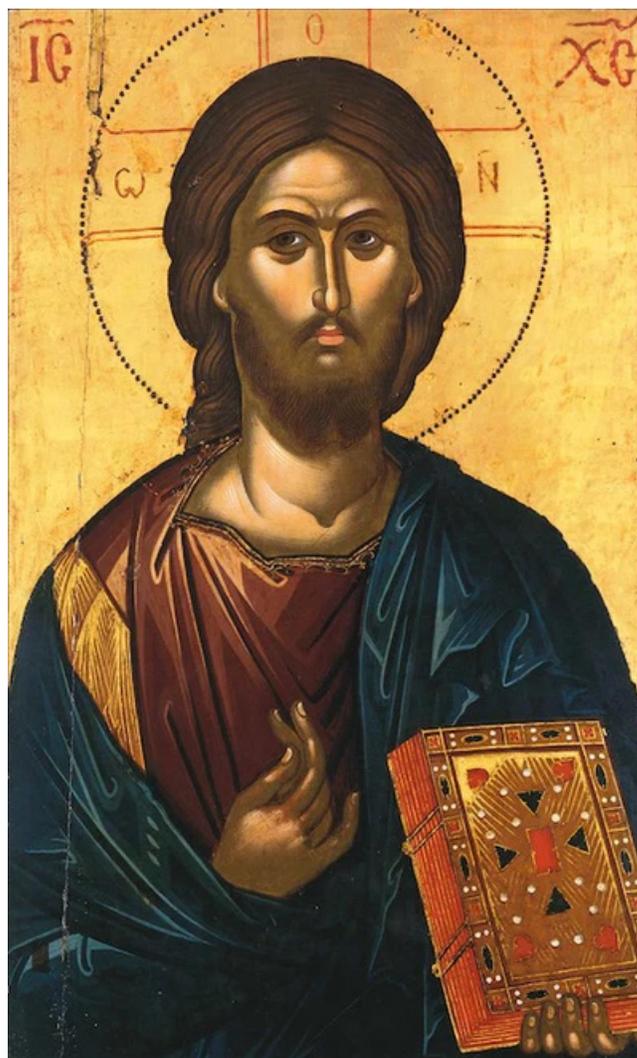
In September 2019, the Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (“the Department”), of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, invited Orthodox Christian Ministries to a meeting focused on the issue of homelessness. These humanitarian organizations serve people who are at risk of homelessness, experiencing homelessness, or have exited homelessness. Over the course of two days, ten organizations attended and fashioned a common understanding of homelessness from an Orthodox Christian perspective.

The inspiration for this meeting came from the work of the Department’s presence, on behalf of the Archdiocese and as a Pan-Orthodox ministry, at the United Nations. The Department has participated in global negotiations and advocacy since 1985 on global issues such as the environment, the human right to water and sanitation, human trafficking, migration, refugees, public health, racism, homelessness, and more.

In 2019, as new members of the UN NGO Working Group to End Homelessness, the Department wanted to offer an Orthodox Christian perspective, based on the work of the Orthodox Church worldwide on homelessness, for global advocacy. The idea for a common understanding was based on the work of the Vincentians, an order of the Catholic Church, and their increased recent efforts to eliminate homelessness, inspired by the ministry of St. Vincent de Paul.

After the creation of a common understanding, the Orthodox Christian Ministries on Homelessness Network (“the Network”) was established to provide a platform for Orthodox Christian organizations and ministries to connect on a monthly basis. These meetings are open to everyone and promote an understanding of homelessness today, challenges to serve people experiencing homelessness, and opportunities for collaboration among ministries.

The guidebook is a project done in collaboration with the Network, under the spiritual direction and blessing of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA. It is our prayer that this guide supports your ministry and helps each of us in our service to Christ and our neighbor.



“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.”

(Matthew 25:35-40)



Homelessness & Orthodox Christian Theology and Practice

Understanding an Orthodox Christian Ethos and Practice



Care for the needy requires the expenditure of wealth: when all share alike, disbursing their possessions among themselves, they each receive a small portion for their individual needs. Thus, those who love their neighbor as themselves possess nothing more than their neighbor; yet surely, you seem to have great possessions! How else can this be, but that you have preferred your own enjoyment to the consolation of the many? For the more you abound in wealth, the more you lack in love.

St. Basil the Great, On Social Justice



By means of that which has been said, make yourselves better prepared to hear that which will be spoken on another occasion, and, if possible, remember all that has been said; and if that be not possible, I beg that, chiefest of all, you will remember constantly that not to share our own riches with the poor is a robbery of the poor, and a depriving them of their livelihood; and that that which we possess is not only our own, but also theirs. If our minds are disposed in accordance with this truth, we shall freely use all our possessions; we shall feed Christ while hungering here, and we shall lay up great treasures there; we shall, be enabled to attain future blessedness, by the grace and favor of our Lord, with whom, to the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, might, now and ever, even to all eternity. Amen.

St. John Chrysostom, On Wealth and Poverty



As Orthodox Christians, we are called upon to serve our fellow human beings in a relational way that recognizes everyone's humanity, value and dignity.

Our theology as Orthodox Christians informs us to be the Church. Our identity inspires us to shine Christ's love in our service to others through Christ-centered empowerment, illuminated by the relational nature of the Eucharist. In recognizing that we are broken and spiritually homeless in need of Christ, we also understand that beyond a physical shelter, each person requires to be served as a whole human being in need of a home; spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally with dignity and respect.

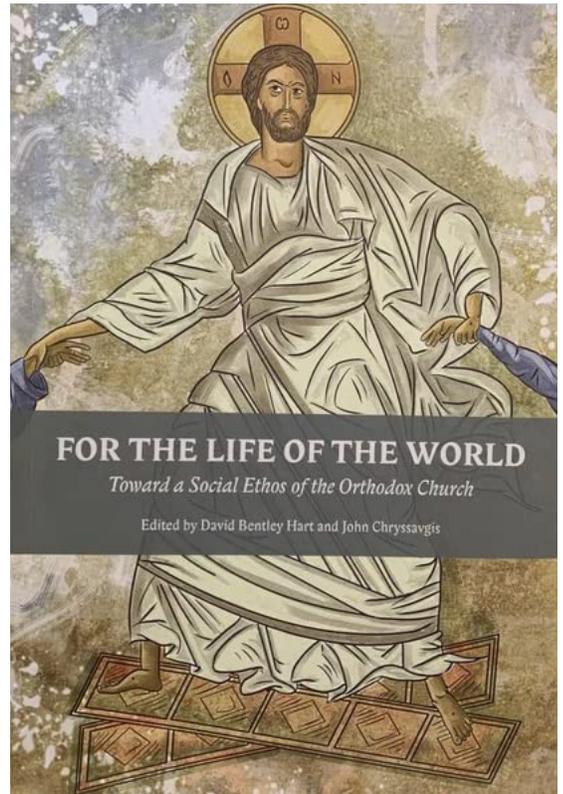
- Orthodox Common Understanding of Homelessness as written in September 2019 at the Pan-Orthodox Christian Ministries Meeting

“All this being so, it is impossible for the Church truly to follow Christ or to make him present to the world if it fails to place this absolute concern for the poor and disadvantaged at the very center of its moral, religious, and spiritual life. The pursuit of social justice and civil equity—provision for the poor and shelter for the homeless, protection for the weak, welcome for the displaced, and assistance for the disabled—is not merely an ethos the Church recommends for the sake of a comfortable conscience, but is a necessary means of salvation, the indispensable path to union with God in Christ; and to fail in these responsibilities is to invite condemnation before the judgment seat of God (Matthew 25:41–45). Thus, it was that the earliest Christian communities of the apostolic age adopted a manner of life radically unlike that of the greater culture, holding all possessions in common and surrendering all private wealth to the community as a whole, so that the needs of every member of Christ’s body might be met (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37). At that time, it did not lie within the power of the Church to fashion civil society anew; nor could the Church—given the absolutely intractable reality of imperial order—produce anything like an abstract political ideology that might correct or ameliorate the injustices of the age. Nevertheless, Christians were able to care for the poor within their reach, and for widows and orphans especially (the most helpless classes of the ancient world), and to create among themselves a polity of love that left no one to his or her fate.”

For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, Paragraph 33. [Read the document.](#)

The Saviour said about Himself: “I am among you as he that serveth” (Lk. 22:27). Service for the salvation of the world and human beings cannot be limited to national and religious limits, as the Lord Himself states clearly in the parable of the merciful Samaritan. Moreover, the members of the Church encounter Christ as the One Who assumed all sins and suffering of the world when they welcome the hungry, homeless, sick or prisoners. Help to those who suffer is in the full sense help to Christ Himself, and the fulfillment of this commandment determines the eternal fate of every man (Mt. 25:31–41). Christ calls upon His disciples not to shun the world, but to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” I. 2.

The Basis of the Social Concept, Moscow Patriarchate. [Read the document.](#)



HOMELESSNESS



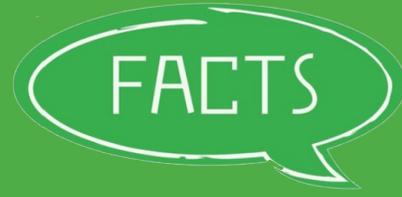
People who are homeless should just get a job and then they would not be homeless.

People choose to be homeless.

People who are homeless are dangerous, violent, and/or criminals.

Housing should come with conditions like being clean and sober.

There is nothing I can do about homelessness.



Many people who are homeless do have jobs, sometimes two or even three. The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates as many as 40%-60% of people experiencing homelessness nationwide are employed. However, a paycheck does not necessarily solve their homelessness or other challenges.

This myth is dangerous and allows us to ignore the trauma of homelessness and neurobiological effects trauma has on humans. Being homeless is stressful, humiliating, exhausting, and dangerous. It is a hard day-to-day existence for men, women, and children.

A person who is homeless is no more likely to be a criminal than a person who is housed, with one legal exception: camping ordinances. People who are homeless break that law merely by being unhoused. The reality is that most spend their time and resources trying to survive and improve their situation.

Evidence tells us that people who are homeless can find stability and healing when provided empowering supports focused on housing and supports. Known as Housing First, this approach acknowledges the complexities of addiction, trauma, and the challenges that come with experiencing homelessness. It also acknowledges that it can be very difficult to successfully address challenges while living on the streets or in an unsafe and unstable situation.

Effectively reducing homelessness will take the entire community working together around this common goal.

Overview of Homelessness

Causes



Community Causes

- Gentrification
- Demolition of low-income neighborhoods & displacement of residents with no other options offered
- Insecure housing situation
- Lack of affordable housing



Household/Family Causes

- Chronic/acute onset of illness of breadwinner or dependent (uncovered medical costs)
- Death of 'head of household' or Divorce
- Substance abuse (lack of affordable detox, rehab, OPD centers) / Mental Illness
- Dysfunctional family / Domestic Violence
- Termination, delay, or denial of public benefits



External Factors

- Evictions
- COVID-19 Pandemic
- Displacement due to natural disasters

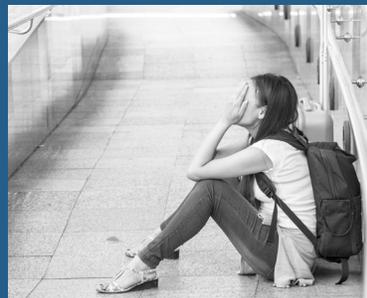
Types of Homelessness



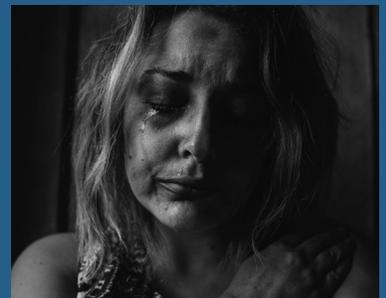
Literally Homeless



Imminent Risk of Homelessness



Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes



Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Types of Homelessness

As defined by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development

Literally Homeless

An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

Imminent Risk of Homelessness

An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence.

Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes

Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless with the above definitions, but who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes, have no occupancy lease agreement in permanent housing, have experienced housing instability for 60 days, and who are expected to continue in a status with no permanent housing because of special needs or barriers

Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

An individual who is fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence and has no other residence and lacks the support to find permanent housing.

Learn more from resources in the Appendix.

Point in Time Count 2022

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. Further, The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that Continuums of Care conduct an annual count of people experiencing homelessness who are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. Learn more here: www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pit-hic/

**Total homeless persons
for Point in Time Count:**



582,500
on a single night

Source: [HUD 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress](#)



Parish Ministry to People Experiencing Homelessness Litmus Test

Self-Assessment Questions

	YES	NO
1. Does your parish welcome the poor, disadvantaged into your church community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does your parish know the needs of people experiencing homelessness in your local community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does your parish have a homeless outreach ministry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does your parish allow for walk up needs based services (food, clothing, financial assistance)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does your parish donate to or work in partnerships with local food banks, shelters, and other organizations that provide services to the homeless?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Does your parish have information materials that can guide the homeless to services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Does your parish have any flyers or pamphlets of ways to help your local homeless population?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do you dedicate at least one Sunday a year to pass the tray for a local organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Circle the number that corresponds to how many questions you answered "yes" above:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Is your parish doing one of these things? **Congratulations!** Ministry in even a small way is important. This guidebook has been created to support the ministries of your parish and to help you do more. The practical steps section will offer steps to continue to grow your ministry in different ways.

Building a Homeless Outreach Ministry at Your Parish

General Community Engagement Process

The general process below offers a **simple foundation for continuous work** to engage your community in the creation of a ministry that serves home-insecure families and people experiencing homelessness.

This process will be applied to communities inclusive of the following:

- Individuals within the community who have shown interest in establishing their own initiatives and ministry activities.
- Communities who understand and believe in the mission of the Church and want to be a part of it.
- A group of supportive and invested local parishioners in their community.
- One or more clergy or parish leaders who are supportive of the group's efforts to serve home-insecure members of their community.
- Where possible, one or more representatives of an Orthodox Christian organization dedicated to ameliorating the plight of home-insecure families and individuals.

Initial Connection

- **Determine your parish's volunteer interest** in creating a sustainable program.
- **Identify a parish leader(s)**, with the blessing of the parish priest, to coordinate the parish's efforts and be the main contact for the ministry and future partnerships with community organizations.
- **Do a community needs assessment** to see where the greatest area of need exists.
- **Learn about local community organizations** to see what work is already being done.
- **Find out where there is room for improvement** and assess the capacity of your parish.
- **Connect with community partners** to find out what they'd like to do, or do more of, if they had the personal and financial resources to do so, and find ways to support their work and further serve the community.
- **Build partnerships with organizations** to better serve the community.

- **Connect with an Orthodox Christian service organization.** To find an Orthodox Christian service organization in your area, check out the [Directory](#).
- **Create a unique plan that is able to serve the specific needs of your community**, inclusive of fundraising efforts, volunteer coordinators, program creators/implementers, community partnerships, Inter-Orthodox/Christian/interfaith cooperation, and spreading the word!
- **Engage people in your community** to be involved and to support the growth of the ministry through service, financial support, time, outreach to partners, and other needs that may arise.

A parish community is at the point of beginning the process of operating an independent parish-based ministry when:

- Consistent programmatic efforts that can be tracked throughout the year (quarterly, monthly, weekly, etc.)
- An assessment of the needs of the community has been made.
- Fundraising, assets and resources have been acquired to assist with their programmatic output, with transparency of financial resources.
- A volunteer pool, donor-base, and community partnerships have been acquired (inclusive of other local Orthodox parishes, Christian churches, schools, community centers, Orthodox organizations, etc.)
- Work with an established advisory board of parish leaders, volunteers, donors, priests, community leaders, etc. to build and operate a plan for service amongst their community's most vulnerable populations.
- Volunteers have been exposed to community poverty by serving the basic needs of local home and food insecure individuals and families.
- This includes briefing and debriefing volunteers before, during, and after each service activity about material and spiritual poverty.
- Leadership roles have been defined within the parish community to carry out the parish-based ministry.
- Parish-based ministry continues to scale in scope and number of programs.

Raising Funds for Your Ministry



Prior to Raising Funds

Make sure you and your ministry team know and understand your purpose for this ministry: what you will do, how you will do it, and what your goals are for this ministry. When you have this knowledge, you are able to speak more freely and passionately when raising funds. You cannot raise funds without knowing “why” you need the financial support.



Budget

Make sure your ministry has created a budget for the upcoming year. Without this, you will not be able to create your fundraising plan.



Fundraising Plan

This will help you and your team gauge how much you need to fundraise to get your ministry off the ground and how you will accomplish that. When writing your fundraising plan you need to keep your budget in mind. By the same token, as you execute your fundraising plan, you should adjust your budget based on how much you raise.

Fundraising Plan

1. Create a realistic and ideal goal
 - Your ideal goal will be **25% greater** than the realistic goal
2. Create a list of ways to raise money and dates this will occur.
 - **Homelessness Sunday:** Pass a tray and speak about the plan for the new ministry
 - **Individuals:** Find a group of 5 people who will be your supporters of this ministry. This does not have to be individuals who give, but individuals with influence who can help you raise your projected goal
 - **Local Non Profits:** Many local non-profit organizations will be willing to help local churches set up homeless services. With this help will come connections to local funders and local community investment programs.
 - United Way and Community Foundations in your local area should be some of your first calls. They will guide you through ways of raising funds for your ministry.

Transform Excess Church Land to Help People and Financially Support the Church

Land is critical to the development of affordable housing. Often parishes have surplus property such as underutilized parking areas, vacant lots, and donated/bequeathed lots. Converting surplus church property into affordable housing may result in a new asset by helping those in need of shelter.

There are many ways to utilize surplus property and convert it to affordable housing. There are many funding and financing sources on the local, state and federal levels including tax credits, Housing Trust Funds, and resources from federal agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development. The resulting design of the projects are varied also (e.g. high rise, garden style, town homes) but the results are the same: quality affordable housing for the long term.

Each project conversion presents its own set of opportunities and challenges. However, each conversion project needs to be concerned with some critical steps:

Site Control

The ultimate developer of the project may be a partner in conjunction with the parish that forms a new corporation. It's important ultimately for successful funding and financing that the developer whether be it the church, an independent development or a newly formed partnership, that they have site control. Without site control, there is no project funding. Many parishes enter into an "Options Agreement" that is contingent on financing. If the project is funded, the agreed-upon acquisition price is included in and paid at construction loan closing. If the application is not awarded funding, the option dissolves and the original owner retains the property.

Project Feasibility

Examine the surplus church property site to ensure it is appropriate for the proposed project type. For example, in developing an affordable housing project, you may want to assure there is accessible shopping and nearby public transportation. Verifying the need for the project will surely reveal potential benefactors who are also church members or parish or diocesan employees.

All real estate development brings a certain number of risks so explaining a mitigation strategy is important. Regarding rewards, projects sometimes not only serve a valuable social purpose, but they also produce proceeds such as acquisition, property management, and developer fees. Those project developer fees are typically earned unencumbered and can be used for any purpose.

Financial Feasibility

The developer of the project will be responsible for securing all of the financing for the development including government and philanthropic funding. Securing these funds requires the developer to determine whether the proposed development will work financially.

The preparation of a preliminary financial feasibility analysis is typically done by a real estate development expert such as a consultant or technical assistance provider who is familiar with affordable housing programs and development. A preliminary feasibility analysis is based on the development concept, the data collected during the site project feasibility phase, and available public funding. This first attempt at estimating the costs to build the development and how it will be financed are preliminary and will be refined many times over the course of the development process.

Other "must-haves" for affordable housing development

1. An independent accurate property valuation
2. Experienced and trustworthy industry experts
3. Clear understanding of government assistance options
4. Knowledge of the potential pitfalls
5. Communication with all parties
6. A realistic and beneficial vision for the property

Appendix

Books

- On Social Justice - St. Basil the Great
- On Wealth and Poverty - St. John Chrysostom
- [For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church](#)
- Desmond, Matthew. Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City. NYC: Crown, 2017.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. The Brothers Karamazov. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990.
- [Collected Works of St. Maria of Paris](#)

Articles

- [Helping, Fixing or Serving?](#) Rachel Naomi Remen

Definitions of Homelessness

- [Key Federal Terms and Definitions of Homelessness Among Youth](#) - U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness
- [42 US Code § 11302 - General definition of homeless individual](#)
- [At a Glance Criteria and Recordkeeping Requirements for Definition of Homeless](#) - U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development

Podcasts

- [The Second Liturgy](#) - Ancient Faith Radio
- [Parables of Community on Ancient Faith](#) - St. John the Compassionate Mission podcast

Websites

- [The Eviction Lab](#)
- [Institute of Global Homelessness](#)
- [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\)](#)
- [UN-Habitat - A Better Urban Future | UN-Habitat](#)
- [The Shift #RIGHT2HOUSING - #maketheshift is a new worldwide movement to reclaim and realize the fundamental human right to housing](#)
- [Publications - National Coalition for the Homeless](#)

Videos

- [Building a Housing First Approach and Implementing Inclusive Best Practices \(CSocD58 Side Event\)](#)
- [Love Thy Neighbor: Taking Action to Serve our Neighbors as an Icon of Christ](#) - Orthodox Christian Event on Homelessness
- Love Thy Neighbor Online Series - [Webinar #1](#) | [Webinar #2](#) | [Webinar #3](#) | [Toolkit](#)
- [Family Homelessness and the "Peace," "Prosperity," and "Partnership" SDGs - Webinar](#)
- [Family Homelessness and the "People" SDGs - Webinar](#)
- [Family Homelessness and the "Planet" SDGs - Webinar](#)
- [Women & Girls' Homelessness and the SDGs in Indigenous Communities](#) - UNPFII Side Event
- [Table Talk with Juha Kaakinen - #1 Geoff Mulgan on Systemic Change and Housing First Approach](#)

Reports

- [Our Research | Joint Center for Housing Studies](#)
- [The Rent Eats First: Rental Housing Unaffordability in the US](#)
- [Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count](#)
- [Housing insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [New Report Shows America's Rental Affordability Crisis Climbing the Income Ladder](#)
- [Baylor Institute for Studies of Relegion Case Study](#) - Assessing the Faith-Based Response to Homelessness in America: Findings from Eleven Cities

Acknowledgments

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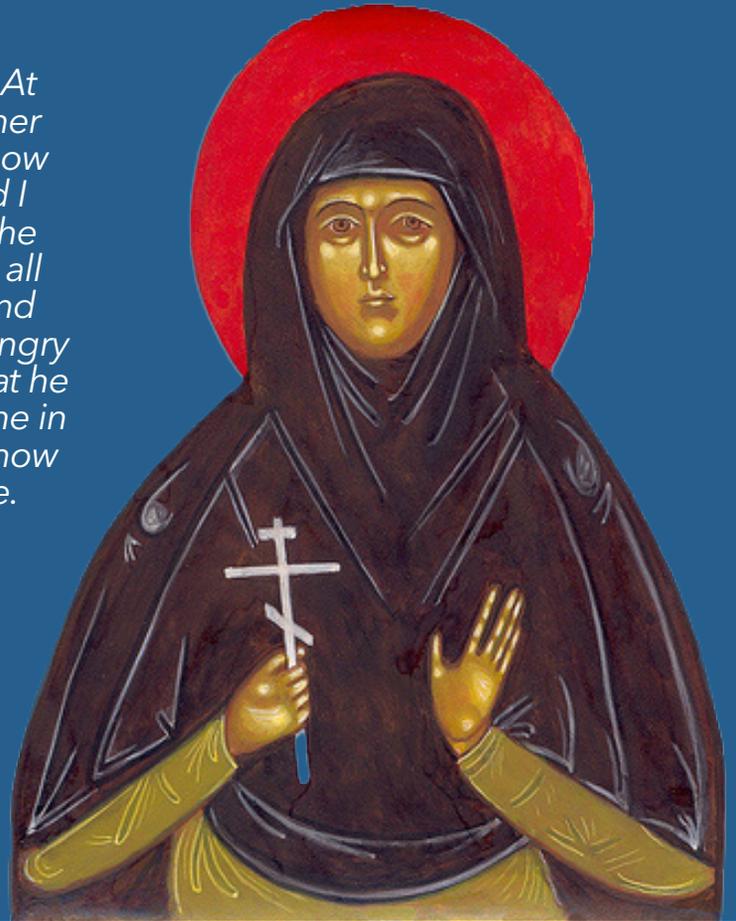
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“

The way to God lies through love of people. At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead I shall be asked did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners. That is all I shall be asked. About every poor, hungry and imprisoned person the Savior says 'I: 'I was hungry and thirsty, I was sick and in prison.' To think that he puts an equal sign between himself and anyone in need.... I always knew it, but now it has somehow penetrated to my sinews. It fills me with awe.

St. Maria (Skobtsova) of Paris



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