

2009 – Update on our local homeless ministries

The Summer of 2009 brought several changes at the Interreligious Fellowship (IRF). The Overflow Shelter Program has ended as of July 31st, the Family Shelter at Saint Cecilia's in Englewood has closed, and a new program named "Family Promise" (www.familypromise.org) is on the horizon.

The ending of the shelter programs brought to a close more than 24 years of dedicated volunteer efforts by OLM parishioners since the programs were started in 1985. Thank you to all the OLM volunteers who welcomed and fed our guests those many years.

Overflow Shelter Program - Bergen County started a new shelter in Hackensack with over 100 beds (up from 30) and a new vision in mind. The new vision is to move individuals in and out quickly, helping them deal with the issues that put them on the street and help them find housing immediately. The increased number of beds and the new program removed the need for the Overflow Shelter hosted by area congregations that in the past served 10 to 20 guests dinner and providing a place to sleep overnight.

Family Shelter at Saint Cecilia's - Families were staying much longer at the shelter than ever before because of the economic conditions and the high cost of housing in Bergen County. The shelter provided comfort, but little motivation to move on into the harsh world. Unfortunately, bed bugs struck the shelter this summer for the second time in three years. Disposing of all the furniture in the shelter and replacing it the first time was very expensive and doing it a second time was prohibitive with no guarantee that the bed bugs would not reappear. Unfortunately the Family Shelter had to be closed.

Family Promise - is a similar program to the Overflow Shelter where families are hosted at area congregations for dinner and overnight. OLM has expressed willingness to the IRF to participate in this program. It will take some time for the IRF to organize this program because there are some differences in the program specifically to help families in need of work and a place to live with children of all ages. The IRF must find a site for a "day center" and a van to transport the families from the day center to the hosting congregations, but Family Promise seems to be the future of the IRF.