

*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* Matthew 22: 37-40

*"I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us...We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them." – Pope Francis*

*"Our listening sessions convinced us that the plight of those living in poverty in our state is reaching crisis proportions. At the same time, we grew in awareness that providing just a little help can make a big difference." - Who is My Neighbor: The Face of Poverty in Washington State. A Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishops of the State of Washington, pg. 2.*

## Safe Parking Ministry

Our Lady of Guadalupe is making plans to partner with the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle to provide a Safe Car Parking Ministry to those who are homeless (adults) who have no place to stay except in their vehicles. Our goal is to welcome these individuals with dignity, respect and the love of God.

- **Who is the Urban League? What do they do?**

The Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with nearly 90 years of community experience in Seattle. The League has historically focused its community work in education, employment, health and housing with Seattle's disenfranchised African-American community. The Urban League is committed to working across the board with diverse communities in order to help make Seattle an equitable and prosperous place to live for all its residents.

- **How is the City of Seattle involved?**

The City of Seattle's Human Services Department is working with faith community leaders across the City to implement the Safe Parking program. Our Redeemer Lutheran began partnering with the City and Urban League to manage their Safe Parking program, which began at their church in 2012. This partnership includes ensuring participant and community safety, managing participant referrals and helping people find permanent housing. The program has capacity to serve up to seven households but currently serves two to three households living in their cars. Over the past six months, all nine households served were able to move to permanent housing. Further expansion of Safe Parking is informed by the success of the program in helping people move from their cars to safer spaces and the input of the faith community and its neighbors.

- **What is asked of the parish?**

OLG is asked to provide a space for up to seven cars in the lower gravel lot behind the Pastoral Center, a space for a portable toilet and portable hospitality hut, and a designated staff contact. We will start with three spots and assess from there.

- **Who will park at OLG?**

Those without homes in our community are a varied group. People are homeless for a variety of reasons. While all are worthy of dignity and respect, we know we cannot serve those with severe issues. The participants in this program will be motivated adult individuals and/or couples with no place to stay except in their vehicles. They will be people who need a little assistance to move on to more stable housing and who are able to seek help and willing to agree to the program rules and requirements.

- **Who will screen the participants and what is the process for getting accepted into the program?**  
 There will be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on file between Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish which details our partnership. Urban League will serve as the service provider for this ministry. Participants referred to Urban League will undergo an intake and screening process, including a credit check and a national criminal background check. If the participant is approved, the Urban League case manager will notify OLG. Each participant will sign a Code of Conduct document developed by Urban League and OLG.
- **Why will the program serve adults only?**  
 Families with children are often able to find housing options more readily than others. Even if a family falls into homelessness, parents are often able to find someone to take in their kids while they themselves live in their cars. The biggest need for safe parking is for single adults and couples. Couples are not allowed to stay together in shelters, which are often divided by gender. This offers them a chance to stay together and keep their cars. People often pair up for safety as well and this allows them not to go it alone.
- **What if applicants have significant mental health or drug issues? What if they are sex offenders or have a violent past?**  
 All participants must be able to make and keep appointments, fill out an application (which includes questions about these issues), meet with Urban League staff, pass a Criminal Background Check and do a Credit Report check. Sex offenses will be checked using a national database and no sex offenders will be accepted into the program. Any persons convicted of violent offenses, with a history of violence or with current violent offenses (including restraining orders and domestic violence) will be screened out and will not be allowed into the program.
- **Is marijuana consider a controlled substance? Does sobriety mean no alcohol on the premises? Can people drink alcohol or smoke marijuana in their cars?**  
 Participants agree to a zero tolerance policy with regards to alcohol, marijuana and illicit drugs. They are not allowed to use them or have them on church property. Violation of this results in termination from the program.
- **What do you do if someone is coming from a Domestic Violence situation? Couldn't their abusers follow them here and potentially cause harm to others?**  
 Participants are screened offsite by Urban League and the location of the site is not publicly listed. Urban League likely would not send someone from a DV situation to a parking site, for their own safety.
- **How will approved vehicles be identified?**  
 Participants approved by Urban League will receive a parking pass that must be displayed in their vehicle. Only vehicles with a parking pass and only participants who have been screened will be allowed to park at OLG (no friends or acquaintances are allowed on the property). Parking spots will be designated with signage. Unauthorized vehicles will be considered to be trespassing and asked to leave. They are subject to being towed as well.
- **What happens if a car breaks down or someone runs out of gas?**  
 The Urban League has funding to provide for car repairs and gas. Participants are not accepted into the program without a working car.

- **Will participants be allowed inside the parish facilities?**

No, not on a normal basis. Urban League will provide and maintain a portable toilet. They will also provide a portable hospitality hut. There will be electricity in the hut so people can charge phones, heat up food, and store perishable items. We hope to have heat as well. These will be located on the grass west of the parking lot and will be locked with a code. Participants will receive invitations to attend/participate in relationship-building opportunities at OLG (such as worship services, special meals, activities, etc.). We may also seek volunteers to help us provide access to laundry facilities, etc.

- **What is the set up?**

Each car would get two parking spaces, in designated, marked spots.

- **How will the parking ministry be monitored and the rules enforced?**

Under normal circumstances, there will not be a monitor from OLG or the Urban League on site during the designated parking hours. Participants will sign and receive a copy of the Code of Conduct when screened and approved so they will know what is expected of them. This is intended to be a self-monitored activity with zero tolerance for infractions of the Code of Conduct. If we notice any problems, they will be reported immediately to the Urban League Case Manager who will respond quickly. We will also have a mechanism for parishioners to share concerns. If someone violates the Code of Conduct, Urban League will terminate them from the program. We also have a relationship with the local police precinct, which regularly drives through our campus to keep an eye on things. We will alert them to this program and ask them to continue their drive-by patrols here. In case of emergency, the participants are directed to call 911.

- **What is expected of the participants during the day? Are they formally connected to resources?**

Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle will provide a Case Manager for each participant. They will meet privately with the participants on a weekly (or assessed time) basis to assess needs for referrals to other agencies, healthcare options, employment, housing options and educational resources to assist in gaining greater housing stability.

- **What do the participants do during the day?**

It varies a lot. Many work. Some have meetings with case managers or other programs. Some go to day shelters for rest/showers/meals.

- **Has the MOU been reviewed by an attorney that represents OLG to completely understand the liability exposure to OLG?**

The Archdiocese of Seattle and CCS have thoroughly reviewed the MOU to understand the liability with this ministry.

- **What is the parish's liability?**

In the MOU, the Urban League agrees to indemnification except for a claim for damages asserted by a program participant for failure to adequately maintain the property or building of OLG (i.e. slip and fall claims). In the Code of Conduct, the guests agree to an indemnification.

- **Is there a limit to how long a person can stay in the lot?**

While there is no mandated timeline, this ministry is intended as a temporary respite, not a permanent housing choice. This is a road to housing not a road to parking! Continued allowance will require adherence to the

Code of Conduct as well as case management with the Urban League. The longest stay in an Urban League lot has been 3 months. The average stay is 2 weeks to one month.

- **What does it take to make this kind of program work well in a parish?**

Clear lines of communication and quick communication if there are any issues are essential. If there are any problems, the designated Urban League contact person needs to be contacted immediately via the appropriate parish contact person. They will then address the problem, correct it, and hold participants accountable. The Urban League will meet with OLG representatives at least monthly and prior to the end of the one-year agreement to assess the program. Either party can terminate the agreement within 10 days of written notice. If a pattern of unresolved problems occurs, the program will leave at the request of the church. It is also good to take it slow, meaning start with the program and then work up to other interactions/fellowship.

- **What ever happened to the WHEEL Women's Shelter? Why didn't that work? Will the same thing happen again?**

OLG began hosting the WHEEL Women's Shelter in November of 2014 for a six-month trial period. In June of 2015 we renewed the Memorandum of Agreement for one year, through June 2016. In March of 2016, WHEEL closed all the indoor shelters in their network due to lack of funds. They moved all residents to an encampment downtown to protest lack of funding. During this time, OLG staff wrote letters of supports to our City officials and also helped promote fundraisers for WHEEL. The shelter network eventually reopened in the fall of 2016.

OLG staff used the break to discern whether to continue to partner as there were a couple concerns during the time we were hosting the shelter. The main issues we faced were shelter participants losing the keys to the building (resulting in costly rekeying), lack of payment from WHEEL (due to their financial restraints), animals staying at the shelter and soiling the floor/eating a plant, and part-time OLG staff who had to manage daily communication with WHEEL. Ultimately, we were not able to resolve the issues with the animals on site in a way that would work for both groups so we decided to look for other ways to provide shelter on our campus. We do not anticipate the same issues since residents will not have access to the building, all locks will be coded not keyed, the City has ample funding for this project, there are no pets allowed, and our staffing situation has changed.

In June 2017, we began exploring hosting Mary's Place rotating shelter. We had a community information meeting in August, formed a volunteer team in November and signed up for our first host week, which was to happen in early 2018. Unfortunately, Mary's Place decided to end their Rotating Shelter program because they did not have enough volunteer sites and the families were finding it difficult to rotate to a new location every week.

Over the past couple years, we learned about Safe Parking programs and discussed the idea of hosting. Now that the City has funding to roll out the program, the time seems right to take the next step in our experience of offering shelter here.

- **Does Urban League run any other Safe Parking lots?**

Yes. They have been operating a lot at Our Redeemer Lutheran congregation in Ballard for the past couple years (the lot has been there for 7+ years). At this site, the guests are allowed to stay in the lot all day and night. They have access to the building for showers, laundry and cold nights. The site is also home to a preschool. Urban League also provides myriad services including homebuyer counseling, mortgage mediation, housing and shelter search assistance, financial budget preparedness, career training, technology assistance, apprenticeship opportunities, and education.

- **How has this ministry been communicated to our parish community, school community and neighbors, and other entities?**

As was mentioned above, the OLG community has a strong history of supporting and running shelter programs on the parish grounds including Family Promise, the WHEEL Women's Shelter and Mary's Place. The Safe Parking program was first proposed to our parish Life, Peace and Justice (LPJ) Commission and our former Mary's Place volunteer team in July. Both groups expressed support so it was brought to the pastor, parish staff and principal for discussion. In August, the LPJ Commission (comprised of parishioners, school parents, a school teacher, a Sister of Providence and a St. Vincent de Paul member) discussed how to share the information with the community and decided on an Information Meeting. In September and October, the parish staff and school principal worked on logistics with the Urban League, the Archdiocese of Seattle, Catholic Community Services, and the City of Seattle, keeping the LPJ apprised as we moved forward. In early November, we met with the Urban League, City of Seattle, parish staff and school principal to review a draft of the MOU and set a time in early December for an informational meeting. By late November it was apparent that we needed more time to work out details so the meeting was rescheduled for December 19. Notices were in the bulletin, on the parish website and on the parish Facebook page starting in mid-November and flyers were up in the parish office and Church bulletin board by late November. A notice went out in the school newsletter in early December and flyers were handed out to nearby neighbors as well as local organizations (West Seattle Elementary, High Point, Seattle Parks, etc.) the week of December 9. An additional notice was in the school newsletter that same week.

- **What do our neighbors think of this idea?**

So far, we have received one email and one phone call, thanking us for informing them and expressing their support.

- **Are other Catholic churches running Safe Parking programs?**

Yes, St. John the Baptist in Covington runs a similar program with Catholic Community Services and St. Jude in Redmond runs their own program. In addition, many Catholic parishes have hosted Tent City encampments, where residents live on campus for 2-3 months in tents. Fr. Kevin's previous parish, Mary Queen of Peace, hosted Tent City 4 times with up to 100 people at a time. They also successfully operated a preschool on site.

- **Are the participants who would stay here from the West Seattle area?**

Not necessarily. Urban League can connect with West Seattle programs to let them know about the option but West Seattle residents won't have priority. It is important that there is a good fit between the applicants and the program.

- **Can participants come in and out during the evening?**

No. They agree to arrive no later than 9pm and not to leave at night so as not to disturb the other participants. In case of emergency or work, they may leave at night.

- **Will people be allowed to bring their pets with them?**

There will be no pets allowed in the program.

- **Will we end up with garbage on our campus?**

Guests agree in the Code of Conduct to be personally responsible for proper disposal of trash. Failure to do this could result in removal from the ministry.

- **Where do participants eat?**

Participants are allowed to use the microwave to heat up food and the coffee pots. We hope to provide some soups and other items for them to eat. We will also welcome them to our monthly Community Meal and try to share local resources for meal programs.

- **Is there a spiritual component to the program?**

Participants will be welcomed to our community gatherings but are not required to participate in order to stay in the lot.

- **Is there an overall manager of the program?**

There is a paid Urban League Case Manager who will oversee the program with Urban League and liaison with OLG.

- **What is being done to keep the children safe?**

Our usual safety practices are as follows: The school building is locked and monitored during the day. EDC keeps the doors locked and monitored as well. There are teachers assigned to keep lookout during drop off in the morning. There are teachers and parent volunteers supervising during recess. Coaches supervise children during practices and the gym building doors can be kept locked. Parents supervise their children as they go to and from events as usual.

- **What kinds of costs are associated with this? Will there be extra maintenance costs? Can we comfortably absorb the costs?**

Guests will be asked to help keep the spaces neat and the Urban League will provide a monthly contribution to offset costs to utilities and maintenance. We do not expect any substantial increase in maintenance costs. Just as we do when other small groups and ministries meet on campus, we'll be able to absorb any minimum increases we see.

- **How can we share this with our kids and get them involved in this outreach?**

Urban League is open to fellowship and connecting with the community. There are endless possibilities but they do suggest just starting with providing shelter.

- **Where else does the Urban League get its funding for this program?**

The Urban League has been contracted by the City of Seattle to run this pilot program. They receive funding from the City to cover additional expenses.