

MARCC PUTS FORWARD NINE HOUSING PRINCIPLES

MARCC (the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati) just introduced a list of housing principles. At a press conference on October 9th, the interfaith coalition unveiled nine principles that provide a blue print for meeting the affordable housing needs of Greater Cincinnati. MARCC, representing seventeen religious denominations, put forward these principles at a time when existing programs to provide housing assistance to low-income and homeless citizens face drastic cuts in public funding.

The President of MARCC, the Rev. Dan Weyand Geise, led off the press conference at St. Peters in Chains Cathedral by reviewing the housing principles and the preamble that serves as the theological structure for them. “Sacred scriptures tell us to make sure no one wants for food, clothing, and shelter,” reads the preamble. “Housing affects all of us in a primary way. Without it, people are at a risk for entering a cycle of poverty with little hope of moving on to a better life,” continues the preamble.

The principles themselves address the housing issues that currently exist in our metropolitan region. They include: “Promote the Fair Housing Act - Require public officials and local communities to adhere to the Fair Housing Act prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, gender, people with disabilities, and families with children.”

2. “Apply The Americans With Disabilities Act – Local governments must implement the rule of law as it applies to accessible housing in relationship to planning as must the developers and builders who implement those plans.”
3. “Serve Economic Justice – Dedicate a portion of all community and economic development grants by federal, state, and local government to affordable housing development.”
4. “Reduce Foreclosures - Minimize housing foreclosures by lenders. Work with the community and home owners to reach reasonable agreements, so individuals and families can remain in their homes, and neighborhoods can avoid blight and disinvestment.”
5. “Maintain Affordable Rental Units – Avoid displacement of people by maintaining the proportion of available affordable rental units as the number of upscale rental units is increased.”
6. “Set Reasonable Rental Subsidies to Attract Responsible Investors – Adjust rates of rental subsidies to reflect market standards for permanent supportive, transitional and permanent housing by local government jurisdictions.”
7. “Acknowledge the Real Unemployment Rate – Include the real unemployment rate in federal and state funding formulas that impact local support for affordable housing by using the percentage of structurally unemployed (unemployed for one year or more), who struggle with or are on the verge of homelessness.”

8. “Support Housing for Young Adults – Increase and dedicate a number of affordable rental units for young adults aging out of foster care, who are at risk of becoming homeless at the age of eighteen.”

9. “Advocate for Restorative Justice – Lessen the stigma and barriers for people with criminal histories who are in need of affordable housing and a second chance to help them succeed in a new life style.”

After the Rev. Weyand Guise’s introduction, several others at the press conference spoke in support of the principles. The Most Reverend Joseph R. Binzer, Auxiliary Bishop of the Arch Diocese of Cincinnati, described decent housing as “a human right. In the midst of a sluggish job recovery, sequestration, and debates over additional federal budget cuts,” noted the Bishop, “we anticipate that this situation will only get worse. So today, the faith community is stepping forward to provide a moral framework for how government, business, non-profits, and other decision makers can help finally alleviate this crisis.”

Besides its denominational leaders, MARCC invited a number of other groups concerned about affordable housing to be participants at the press conference. Representatives from the Homeless Coalition, the Legal Aid Society, the Faith Community Alliance, Grace Place, the Jimmy Heath House, Clergy Active in Northside, Volunteers of America, and the Interfaith Hospitality Network took part in the event.

No newcomer to the issues of housing, MARCC has had affordable housing and homelessness as priorities for a number of years. MARCC’s leaders felt that local trends made it particularly timely to use the nine principles as a vehicle for making people aware of current housing needs and the available methods for addressing them. “Our interfaith coalition,” noted the preamble to the principles, “historically and at present sees homelessness and affordable housing as major social issues that demand more work be done.”

