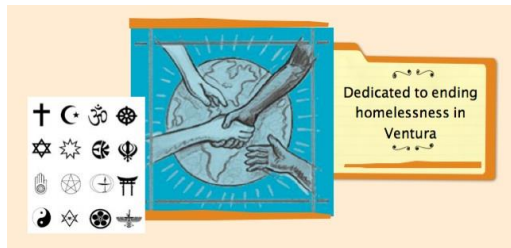


# NEWSLETTER

## Faith Subcommittee Ventura Social Services Task Force

Pam Marshall, Chair, Faith Subcommittee  
Judy Alexandre, Chair, Ventura Social Service Task Force



### *In case you missed it...*

Video links are available below for the special DVD: “**Finding A Way Home**” from the Sabbath on Homelessness of Feb. 24-26<sup>th</sup>.

19-minute version:

<https://vimeo.com/203223378>

5-minute version:

<https://vimeo.com/204102284>

Dear All:

Several of you have voiced a desire for the Faith Subcommittee to be more involved in a range of current social concerns. The Faith Subcommittee is a part of the Ventura Social Services Task Force (VSSTF) whose mission is to address issues that will lead to ending homelessness in Ventura. Our membership serves a wide range of beliefs and perspectives and we are united in the goal of reaching a functional zero level of homelessness.

Our current objective is to advocate for the establishment of a year-round crisis and bridge housing shelter with services that will meet the needs of our homeless neighbors. With this we also recognize the need for there to be a greatly increased supply of very affordable, extremely and affordable housing.

We are getting closer to having the City of Ventura allow zoning for the establishment of such a facility.

### **You can help!!!!**

On March 8 at 6 pm at City Hall the Planning Commission will be making their zoning recommendation. Assuming a positive outcome, Council will vote on the zoning change and hopefully establish basic guidelines for the facility on March 20th at City Hall.

**We need you to attend these meetings**...not speak...just attend. This is especially true for the 20th.

VSSTF will be identifying a few speakers to represent VSSTF and its committees. If, however you as an individual or as a congregation desire to speak, of course you are welcome to do that. What we need is your presence, support and to show Council that there is a large community behind their taking this action.

Thank you again,

Judy Alexandre, Chair, VSSTF  
Pam Marshall, Chair, Faith Subcommittee

## Counting Day

January 24, 2017, National Homeless Count Day  
by Ben Unseth, Project Understanding Director

Snowy mountains glow pink from the rising sun.  
Wool socks fail to warm my toes,  
And my partners and I climb into my Honda to count.  
All across our nation on this day in January,  
We are taking a census of homeless neighbors,  
And the wind bites my ears.

*One.*

We park and walk toward a stroller  
Wrapped up like a sloppy present in bright green and  
blue plastic tarps,  
And the stroller hugs the back steps of a business.  
I quiver as I reach it—  
At the leather-skinned woman who shivers on the steps,  
And I meet Martha.  
Do you have any children with you?  
*No, I raised twin boys who joined the Army.*

*They work in town.*

My partner Eva  
Reaches into her bag  
And offers Martha a gift of gloves.

*Two.*

As we park near a cluster of homeless neighbors,  
They scatter across the street into a park to avoid conflict,  
And we gently approach.  
Because Armando's English is fragmented,

Eva asks our questions in Spanish,  
And we pry into his life.  
Do you have a chronic illness? *Yes.*  
Do you have a drug or alcohol problem? *Not anymore.*  
And do you have AIDS or HIV? *Yes.*

My partner Eva

Reaches into her bag  
And offers Armando a present of socks.

*Three.*

Rachel lies in her blankets on cold concrete.  
She was evicted last summer,  
And she cannot find her way back home.

We continue our questions:

Where were you born? *California.*

Are you a victim of domestic violence? *Yes.*

Eva pulls a pretty leather jacket from her bag, saying,  
"This is the first jacket my mother bought when she came  
to the U.S.,

And I would like you to have it."

*Four.*

*Five.*

*Six—*

*Ten.*

*Twenty.*

*Thirty.*

*Forty—*

*One hundred. Two hundred—*

**Counting breaks our hearts.**

## Houses of Worship Donate Faithfully to Prevent Homelessness

Thanks to the generosity of many faith communities and individuals who donate every month or a few times a year to the Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund, an average of four households every month who are facing eviction have some or all of their rent paid, and they go on to remain stably housed. Among the houses of worship faithfully supporting this work through regular donations are the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Ventura Missionary Church, Ventura Church of Christ, Church of the Foothills, Orchard Community Church, Insight Meditation, and Temple Beth Torah or the Ventura County Jewish Council. Since the Homeless Prevention Fund began its work in 2007, these donations have kept a total of 423 households consisting of 663 adults and 356 children in their homes.

There are at least 11,000 people with incomes below the federal poverty level living in the City of Ventura. Most of them are paying somewhere between 50% and 70% of their income for rent each month. For them, and even for some who have good incomes, one major financial setback can put them on the brink of homelessness. Here are a few of the families that donations have allowed the Fund to help recently:

A single mother raising a teenage son was injured at work. She was in a wheelchair and unable to work for three months. She received workman's comp, and friends helped, but still her savings were eventually depleted and she was unable to pay the rent. The Fund paid one month's rent, and that was just enough to carry the family through until Mom could heal and return to work.

A single father raising twin 16-year-old daughters was laid off from his job as a machine operator on an offshore oil platform. His brothers and sisters had helped him pay rent as long as they could. Though he had begun a new job, he wouldn't get his first paycheck until mid-month and the family was facing eviction. The Fund paid that month's rent, and the eviction process ended. Another family was kept housed.

A couple in their 70s, surviving on their income from social security had major car repair expenses that left them unable to pay their rent in full. They paid the part of the rent they had, but they could not see a way to find the rest of the money. When they received an eviction notice, they recalled having read about the Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund in the newspaper. The Fund paid their back rent and the crisis was averted. Case managers from the Salvation Army or Project Understanding work with each family to make sure this one-time help will put the family is receiving all the types of assistance for which they are eligible. In this case, the case manager worked with the couple to begin a very modest savings plan for future crises like the car repair and referred them to a variety of programs that could help them stretch their budget.

If you know someone in need of this help, please have them contact the Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund at [805-626-0363](tel:805-626-0363). If your faith community would like to donate, check out our webpage at [vhpf.net](http://vhpf.net).

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## Highlighting a Congregation:

**The River Community Church** – Your Partners in Life  
859 E. Santa Clara Street Ventura, CA 93001

The River Community Church began in Jim Duran's sister's condo in January of 2004. This twelve-person bible study had a heart to reach the city of Ventura. Today, TRC is located in downtown Ventura and has been extremely active when it comes to the homeless issues in the community.

TRC has a ministry called, "Bags of Love". Twice a month members of TRC head out to the local motels with lunches in hand. They give them to the homeless individuals and families currently living in these motels. The free lunch is an open door to begin the dialog to introduce these residents to resources that may get them the help they need to get housed. TRC offers lunch, prayer, a ride to church and hope for those individuals needing a hand up.

The Food Pantry at TRC is open twice a month to offer under resourced people an emergency food supply. Once a month during the food pantry hours, Community Memorial Hospital offers a Free Health Clinic to our homeless population by offering free wound care, health screening, flu shots and many other important health services. Cal-Fresh is also in attendance at the food pantry to assist those who may need addition recourses for food.

TRC also has a full-time staff member working the front desk to assist those individuals in need of housing or other homeless services. TRC collaborates with the local social service agencies in the area in order to help their visitors move out of homelessness. And on Thursdays, you will find Pastor Don Knisley at TRC available to provide counseling for our homeless population.

TRC is also very active with The City Center Transitional Living. Lead Pastor Jim Duran is the Executive Directors for The City Center and Pastors Terry & Dee Cox are the on-site managers. TRC also provides mentors to the residents at The City center as well as financial support. TRC also financially supports, Project Understanding, Tender Life Maternity Home and Teen Challenge International.

TRC works hard in partnering with individuals to be all that God created them to be. TRC offers a hand up in order to assist the homeless population in becoming self-sufficient.

– Pastor Jim Duran



### **SPREAD THE WORD!**

*We hope you will share this newsletter with your congregations and friends. We will be providing information from special committees on homelessness, low income housing developments, and highlighting different faith-based agencies and communities.*

*Please consider sending us a few paragraphs about what your congregation is doing to help our homeless neighbors.*

**Contact: Pam Marshall:**  
[pojcat@verizon.net](mailto:pojcat@verizon.net) for more information  
 or if you have any questions.

**Visit our website:** [www.VSSTF.org](http://www.VSSTF.org)

### **Mission of the Faith Subcommittee of the VSSTF**

The Mission of the Faith Subcommittee is three-fold:

1. Outreach to the over 90 churches, synagogues, and temples in Ventura in order to increase participation in the Faith Subcommittee and in the mission to end homelessness
2. Coordination among all of the faith groups providing assistance to homeless individuals so that government agencies, private service providers and faith groups can:
  - Know precisely what services each provides
  - Learn best practices from others offering similar services
  - Avoid any unproductive duplication
  - Refer those in need to others providing the needed service
  - Learn what gaps in service exist and discuss who might best step in fill each gap
  - Share their needs with one another in the hope that greater coordination can allow each to do more and can lead to the most effective use of limited resources
3. Facilitate two-way education between the city-wide faith community and other entities, including the VSSTF, government agencies, and private service providers in order to:
  - Increase awareness within each of areas of need, and strategies or approaches that are proving effective (or ineffective) in reducing homelessness
  - Ensure that those outside the faith community have realistic expectations of what needs the city-wide faith community can be expected to meet.