

Special Report

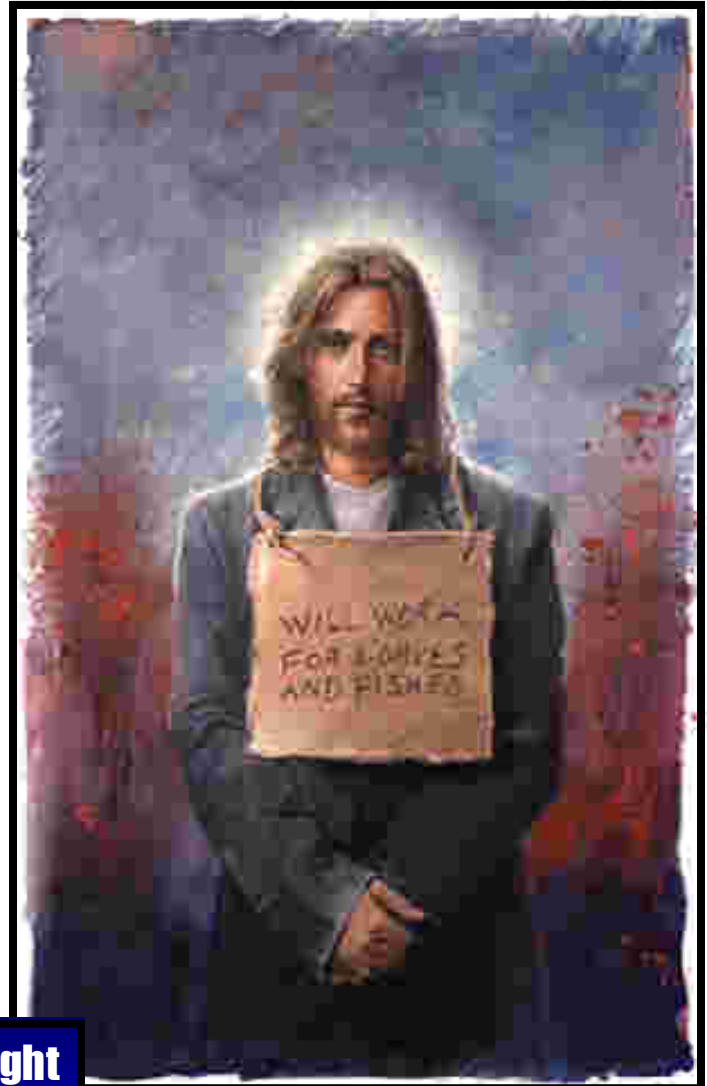
Dear Churches:

I have several different reasons why I am writing this letter to you. One reason is to tell you a little about the operation of our shelter. The other reasons are to inform you about the services we provide to the community, to make clear any rumors that you may have heard about us and to advise you about a situation that has taken place recently.

The Homeless Voice shelter has been servicing Broward, Palm Beach, and Miami/Dade Counties for almost 10 years now. We are a self supporting agency that receives no government funding. Most people are unaware of the role the Homeless Voice newspaper plays in the operation of the shelter. It's purpose is to collect street donations from the sale of the Homeless Voice newspaper to pay for most of the operational costs of the Homeless Voice shelter. Other costs to operate the shelter are paid for by way of a sliding scale fee through clients who receive Social Security/Disability income, work with day labor companies or other outside employment. For our clients that can't work or can't pay, (for reasons beyond their control,) their stay at our shelter is free of charge. We achieve this because our system is comparable to the structure hospitals utilize; the income from self pay and insured patients covers the cost for those who cannot afford to pay for their hospital stay.

Unlike other shelters that accept government funding and must adhere to strict guidelines, we have the freedom to accept all types of homeless people. We're not saying we are better than other shelters, just different because without the link of a governmental program, we are free to set our own ground rules. That is also the reason why people don't have to go through a long process for placement here and are guaranteed a bed no matter what their circumstances might be.

The main reason why I decided to write this letter is to make you aware of an incident that happened recently and clear up any concerns you may have about us and to avoid any future misunderstandings. Last week a church telephoned us, (they are our biggest referral source) to ask to place a



I know you might be helping other agencies right now, but if you would just please come by and check us out you would see the difference.

homeless person at our shelter. They had no idea that the shelter they were calling was the Homeless Voice shelter, because the telephone was answered as the Coalition for the Homeless. The staff person who answered the telephone began assisting the person. And the person on the other end of the telephone stated that there were no beds anywhere and that the hospital had given him our number. He also stated that he was going to try to call the Homeless Voice but when he mentioned it to his associate pastor, the pastor told him not to waste his time because he had heard that they were just a newspaper, had no shelter and lied to the public to make people think that they were a shelter. After hearing this, the staff person responded by telling the caller that I need to put you on hold for a moment to get someone who

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can better assist you. While on hold, I was informed as to what conversation had taken place, so I personally took the call. I asked him what other places he had called and he started to name a few shelters and said all of them told him they couldn't help him at this hour. I asked him if he tried calling the Homeless Voice shelter and he said no. He went on to say that his associate pastor had told him that he had heard that the Homeless Voice was a scam, that they lied to the public to make people think that a shelter existed when in fact the shelter is a hoax and that the director lived in the Islands and came to visit the shelter by private jet and that he drove a Mercedes. At this time I still did not say anything to defend myself or the shelter. I then asked him if I could speak to the associate pastor to inquire about the Homeless Voice. He put me on hold to get him. When I questioned the associate pastor, he repeated the same things about the Homeless Voice shelter and it's director and then added that he was also told that the director even had a second house on the intra-coastal. I told the pastor that I recently bought a Homeless Voice shirt from one of the vendors and was wearing it. I said I'd better take it off and then I heard him chuckle. I gave him the address and told him he could send the homeless man over to us. But the pastor said he and his colleague would bring the homeless man to our shelter in about 30 minutes. The time passed quickly and I went downstairs to wait for them to arrive, proudly wearing my Homeless Voice shirt. When the pastor and his colleague arrived I jokingly pointed to my shirt and the pastor laughed. I gave them a brief tour of our downstairs, left the homeless man who they had

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brought in with them with our case manager for intake and proceeded to our upstairs office. When we arrived upstairs I gave them another tour. This included our sleeping quarters. Lois was already in her bed between the wall and the filing cabinet, Aaron was stretched out on his floor mat reading and Cathy was changing the sheets of her floor mat to get ready for bed. The pastor was quite impressed and said now this is the way real homeless providers should sleep, instead of living the life of luxury. He went on to say that the acquaintance that told him about the Homeless Voice said that he had met with the director and that he had had so much gold on that he didn't know how he was able to stand up straight. I later asked the pastor if he could give me a scripture from the Bible about the things that God really hates that people do so that I could teach our clients some good Christian principles. He told me he had the perfect scripture and even wrote it down for me. He said it was from Proverbs and that it went like this : "haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers". He then went on to tell me about rumors and lies and that people spreading them can be very destructive.

After touring and talking for about 30 minutes, I took our books out and showed him our budget. He then took 50.00 out his wallet and wanted to make a donation and we accepted it gladly. He later asked for a receipt and I lightheartedly stated, I could not give him one because then I would have to record the donation and that would not allow me to wire our director the money like they do at the Homeless Voice. He laughed but still didn't catch on. I then wrote up a receipt for his donation. As he was leaving I said I forgot to stamp your receipt with the name of our agency, so he gave the receipt back to me. I took a rubber stamp out of my desk drawer and stamped his receipt. He then read the words "Thank you, the Homeless Voice". It was then that I told him I was the director of the Homeless Voice and inquired about his acquaintance and asked him if he still believed the lies that had been spread about me after meeting with me and touring our shelter. I asked him if there was anything else I could show him to convince him we were not a scam. But by then he was quite embarrassed, just kept apologizing over and over and quickly left.

In the past we have heard similar statements from church leaders. Even the vendors have been called names by people waiting at the corner for the light to change after just having exited their church parking lot. A lot of churches do help us and a lot of the church members assist us not only by buying our paper but by coming to the shelter and giving bible lessons or even holding church

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services here where we all live. After hearing all these rumors, I thought we should try to communicate with the churches more and to clarify false rumors, considering the churches are our biggest referral source. I still was not too sure how many churches felt this way so we called several to solicit donations. Some made negative comments and others said no and hung up quite abruptly. Those experiences led me to write this letter to you because I wanted you to know that we receive numerous calls from churches for the placement of homeless people (which we gladly accept) and to ask for support. The reason we need your support is that a few years ago I went on a mission trip to Haiti. Shortly after my return from Haiti, I went into a coma with bacterial meningitis and almost died. Since then our agency has undergone tremendous changes and I no longer have the ability to run this place the way I used to because I have had to alter my life and cannot do the same things I had done before the meningitis such as, work as many as 100 hours a week and dedicate all my time to the shelter.

We are making a request for assistance at this time because we need the financial security to expand our services. We have provided charity to our community for approximately ten years, free of charge and are now in need of your help. This letter may seem to you like just a donation request but it is so much more. What we really want is for you to take this opportunity to visit with us and learn about what we do; seek the truth before you support our efforts.

Did you know?

-)= We have 14 social services agencies throughout the world.
-)= It cost about 1 million a year to run the five shelters we have.
-)= We are one of the biggest shelters in the community but operate on about 30 percent less costs than other shelters do.
-)= We do not pick and choose our clients; our doors are open to everyone 7 days a week 24 hours per day.
-)= The only people we do not take anymore are sex offenders because the community didn't want us to house them.
-)= Our staff is 90 percent smaller than any other shelter in the community.
-)= We have only 10 employees that run five shelters.
-)= Our vendors are fully trained prior to going out on the road.
-)= Each team has a captain to monitor vendors' activities.
-)= We provide each captain with a cellular telephone in case an emergency arises.

"We have provided charity to our community for approximately ten years, free of charge and are now in need of your help. This letter may seem to you like just a donation request but it is so much more."

-)= We pay for an independent outside loss prevention team to prevent stealing and report unbecoming vendor behavior and activities.
-)= Most of our staff has been certified by the American Red Cross as professional CPR/AED and oxygen administrator rescuers.
-)= Our top paid employee has been here for nine years and receives just a little over 30,000.00 per year for about 70 hours of work per week.
-)= We provide food stamp services.
-)= We have a substance abuse support group and life skills classes.
-)= We have volunteer doctors and nurses who come in to assist our clients daily.
-)= We make applications for people who are in need of supplemental Social Security and Disability benefits.
-)= One year I took a \$16,000 salary, the other eight years my salary totaled less than \$2,500 a year.
-)= I have not had to work since 1985 because of a large court settlement that I was awarded due to a case involving injuries.
-)= I currently live off my investments as well as some rental income.
-)= My salary should be over \$90,000 a year if I paid myself what other shelter directors receive.
-)= I paid cash \$96,500 for my house in 1993. This was four years before the Homeless Voice shelter actually opened its doors.
-)= I drive a company car, it's a 2004 Hyundai. However, just last week some nice person donated a bigger car for me to drive for a year. The bigger car will make me a lot more comfortable because I've gained an excessive amount of weight from taking steroids because of the meningitis.
-)= I was a volunteer for the American Red Cross for 3 years and dedicated volunteer time to many other agencies that were not controlled by me.
-)= We do not pay for audits. We feel that there is no need to spend \$10,000 a year of the public's donation money for an audit if we do not take government money. Besides it does absolutely nothing to prove that an agency is doing something right or wrong (look at what happened with all those fortune 500 companies that ripped off the public) their audits did not prove anything. So we do something better than paying for audits we make all of our books available and open to the public. Call around, I don't believe you will find one charity that will give you permission to get copies of their bank statement deposits or checks, but we will.

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All this information I provided you with is no secret because it is public information so please feel free to check it out.

If you have been one of the churches that have not helped us in the past because of these so called rumors, I hope I have set the record straight. Please come by and ask us any questions you want, review all the facts, see what we do, where we sleep and the hours we work. If then, you're still not convinced about our motives... then just pray for us. But please don't judge us without investigating the truth. I was really hurt by the incident that happened with the pastor and the responses we got from the few calls we made to the churches we called afterward. We are all God's children and all belong to one community, together we can make this place bigger and better and when we accomplish this we will be able to service more people.

An example of making this happen would be if 1,890 churches each gave us \$500.00, we would be able to pay off our current mortgage and have enough left over to expand. By the way our main shelter has a monthly mortgage payment of \$8400.00. That means we have to raise triple that amount because 60 percent of what the vendor brings in goes right back to the vendor because this is their job. Our budget is around \$110,000.00 a month. If our

mortgage was paid off our budget would go down to about \$100,000.00 a month. If we accomplished this we would then ask about 376 churches to each give us \$266.00 per month because that would cover our monthly budget. It would also allow us not to be forced to sell our paper to cover the expenses we now have serving communities. Rather, we could trim down the sale of our Homeless Voice newspaper. Or maybe we could just pass out the paper free of charge. I know you might be helping other agencies right now, but if you would just please come by and check us out you would see the difference. I think once you see what we deal with you will want to help our shelter as well as still helping other causes And if you did, it would help us to regain control and help me to fully recuperate back to 100 percent.

I do want to take the time to thank those churches who do support us by coming here and giving our sheep the word of God. I also want to thank some of the Catholic churches that have allowed us to come in after Mass and say a few words and then sell our paper to their members; this has raised some extra funds needed to help pay off our mortgage.

I am looking forward to your response.

Respectfully yours,


Sean Cononie



HOMELESS VOICE

Helping
the
Homeless
Help
Themselves

See where your donations go.

COME TAKE A TOUR OF OUR HOME



Visit the Homeless Voice Shelter
1203 N. Federal Highway
Hollywood, Florida 33020
Call Ginny at 954-920-1277

