

An open letter to the people and leaders of Ashland and the Rogue Valley:

We, the Interfaith Clergy Circle of Ashland, Oregon, raise a call to action on behalf of our homeless and at-risk neighbors here in Ashland and beyond. We are one neighborhood, one community, stretching town to town across the Rogue Valley. We call all people of good heart to come together to cultivate compassion for each other, rich and poor, young and wise, hopeful and despairing.

We recognize a deep and growing need in our community for all to have access to clean water, sustaining food, safe shelter, and basic medical care.

"You have within you more love than you could ever understand." Rumi

We entreat those with comfort to give comfort to those in need. We entreat those with full bellies to fill the bellies of the hungry. We entreat those with safe shelter free of fear or cold or heat or harm to share in the building of a place of shelter for those in need to rest their burdens, shower, recuperate, and heal from the trauma of living on the street. We entreat the whole community to take the action needed to build, fund, and sustainably operate a shelter for men, women and children, the elderly, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, local and accessible to those in need.

There is a real and sustained need for a shelter where community members and caseworkers can build fruitful relationships; a central location where community can be forged and recovery can begin; a central location where guests can count on a place to sleep, a respite from summer smoke and heat, a warm place to escape the snow and ice, and a place from which sustainable housing can be found and a more stable life can grow.

Such a shelter must be in the community it will serve. In a community shelter, caseworkers can be mindful of the needs of the residents of that community—keeping children in school and those in need near their networks of support. Shelter provides the consistent rest and stability for employed adults to responsibly maintain their jobs, even when they don't earn enough money to rent their own residences. Caseworkers must be prepared to offer trained and sustained assistance for those with disabilities and mental illness, and in this way, achievable goals can be set in the healing of illness, addiction, poverty, and abandonment. Food, water, and shelter are universal rights given to every person as a child of God. Such care and provision is a spiritual and moral obligation. The mandates of compassion and care of neighbor unite all faiths, wisdoms, and disciplines. Providing adequate housing to everyone is a religious duty in Judaism. Most famous among these texts is Isaiah's prophetic cry to "take the poor into your homes." For Christians, Jesus says "feed the poor, clothe the naked, comfort the sick." For the spiritual but not religious, we ask: What does the spiritual involve in terms of taking action? How is the Spirit the agent for a better world? For the humanist, we call for action to uplift humanity.

*"May we resolve to dedicate our life to the service of humankind,
and uplift them to Divinity." Yajur Veda*

We applaud the efforts over many years of the many hundreds of leaders, professionals, and volunteers who have taken action across Ashland and the Rogue Valley to alleviate suffering and build relationships across income levels. As a community, we are all in this together. We share accountability to the life we live and choose. If we walk by the one in need, what are we accountable to? For every person is a person of sacred worth, and every voice deserves to be heard. We believe we are in a time of great opportunity. The need for day and night shelter is clear. We ask for the generosity of the comfortable, the stewardship of the professional, the compassion of the faithful, and the leadership of the political. We need one place. A sustaining place. A transforming place. A uniting place. In the face of years of effort by churches, leaders, and community members, it is unconscionable to imagine November arriving and there still not being a place for our homeless neighbors.

We ask for compassion. We call for action. Be a signatory to this letter, donate, or volunteer. Act. For, in a community fractured by want, we must come together as one people, one community, one standard of care, one outpouring of faith.

"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." St. Augustine

Signed,
Ashland Interfaith Clergy Circle

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst,
Senior Pastor, First United Methodist Church of Ashland
revrichenda@ashlandmethodist.org

Rev. Dan Fowler
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Ashland
revfowler@yahoo.com

Rabbi Julie Benioff
Temple Emek Shalom

Rabbi Joshua Boettiger
Temple Emek Shalom

Rev. Norma J. Burton
Unity in Ashland Church
Circle of Trust Healing Center

Rev. Pandora Canton
Chaplain Asante Ashland Community Hospital and Asante Hospice

Rev. Sean Parker Dennison,
Developmental Minister, Rogue Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Rosanna Ferraro-Jensen
Chaplain, Asante Hospice

The Very Rev. Fr. Tony Hutchinson, SCP, Ph.D.
Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church
Dean, Southern Oregon Convocation of Episcopal Churches

Rev. Christina G. Kukuk
First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC)

Rev. Allan Miles
Deacon, St. Martin's Episcopal Church

Alex Reid and Bob Morse,
South Mountain Friends Meeting Shelter Coordinators

Rev. Liz Olson, M.Div, BCC
Chaplain for Providence Medford Medical Center and Rogue Valley Manor
Pioneer Hall overnight host

Rev. Paula Sohl,
Associate Minister, First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC)

Rabbi David Zaslow
Havurah Synagogue

The Rev. Meredith Ayer Pech
Deacon, Trinity Episcopal Church, Ashland

The Rev. Tom Buechele,
Priest-in-charge, St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Shady Cove

The Rev. Bert A. Anderson,
Associate Priest, Trinity Episcopal Church.

Addie Green,
Citizen, Ashland, Oregon.

Patricia Morrison,
Clerk, South Mountain Friends Meeting (Quakers)

Shirley Patton
Member, First Presbyterian Church of Ashland

The Rev. Morgan Silbaugh
Trinity Episcopal, Ashland

Marcia Hunter,
Member First Presbyterian Church of Ashland

The Rev. Mary Piper
Episcopal Priest and Chaplain, Ashland

Dr. Bruce and Carolyn Johnson

Coyote Marie Hunter-ripper
Cherokee Traditional Practitioner
Member, First United Methodist Church of Ashland.

Karen Amarotico,
First Presbyterian Church Shelter
Coordinator.

Virginia King
Member, First Presbyterian Church Ashland

Margie Lininger,
First Presbyterian Church, Ashland

Rev. Caren Caldwell
United Church of Christ minister, retired