



# St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

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February 4, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Over the last several years, the Homeless Coalition has been working with the County Commissioners to develop an emergency shelter program for Vigo County that would allow for several agencies to work together to get people out of unsafe extreme weather conditions. The main actor in this work has been Reach Services, and for the last two years, Reach has developed the systems for facilitating the emergency sheltering of some of the people in our community who are experiencing homelessness.

This year, Reach needed help in making an emergency shelter possible. They turned to us. With an extreme weather event coming this weekend, the vestry agreed on behalf of the congregation to allow Reach to utilize our Great Hall for this weather event and potential other weather emergencies in February or March of 2021.

Reach, with its trained volunteers, will screen each participant (up to 20) for health, risk, and need. They will provide the special cots and bedding, PPE, cleaning supplies, and the supervision, including onsite security. Reach has experience providing safe conditions for people who need it.

When Susie Thompson of Reach Services reached out to us, she said that when she thinks of giving to the community she thinks of St. Stephen's; particularly in matters of homelessness. A sense echoed publicly by the commission.

I'm also reminded of the Diocesan mission, which we just reviewed at our Annual Meeting, which says:

Grounded in God's love in Christ, the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis and its people:

- Serve as beacons of Christ in central and southern Indiana and beyond
- Offer a generous invitation and welcome

- Stand with the vulnerable and marginalized and transform systems of injustice
- Connect with other Episcopalians, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and advocacy groups
- Develop clergy and laity to lead the church of today and tomorrow.

This opportunity hits all five parts of the mission at once.

We are also receiving donations from outside groups which will allow Reach to provide the participants with a warm, home cooked dinner every night that sheltering is necessary.

Our location is ideal, but it is the size and design of the Great Hall that make us a perfect partner for this project. Each entrance into the Great Hall has a door, so we can enclose the room to provide those seeking shelter with an additional sense of safety while allowing Reach a strong sense of security for the building.

Safety measures, including masking and cleaning of the Great Hall and bathroom will be followed each night.

Our deacon, Deby Veach described it succinctly:

“[Presently] we are not in the building to keep our parishioners safe but we need to let the homeless inside to keep them safe.”

Grace and Peace,

**The Rev. Andrew Downs**

Rector, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church