

The Sharing Community

Years ago, I pastored a church that hosted a very large organization which supported people experiencing hunger and homelessness. They served hundreds of meals each and every day of the year. This gave a true opportunity for the voice of the unhoused to be heard. They also provided a place for people to receive mail, a common issue for people without a permanent address. That meant my address was the same as all of these clients. When I went to the Social Security Office and told the clerk my address, she responded “ahh, okay, the sharing community.” She was right. I shared my address with many wonderful people.

Listening Closely

In the colder months of the year, occasionally clients would come to the 8:00 AM service and sleep on the back pews. Some parishioners objected, but it seemed to many others that this was fine. The overnight shelter closed at 6:30 AM and it was very cold outside. We were heating a church that could seat eight hundred people, with only about a dozen there for 8:00 AM.

The coffee hour became a time when many of these clients would gather with us, and pretty soon all the chores surrounding coffee hour were being adeptly fulfilled and the kitchen was cleaned. We had a time of fellowship and friendship that arose between parishioners and people experiencing homelessness, poverty, and other critical life challenges. I was often able to connect people with assistance just by being aware of what was available to offer.

Amplifying the Voice of the Unhoused

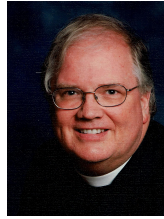
One woman volunteered to organize our rummage sale that we held each Thursday at our farmer’s market. She would spend several hours each week sorting and organizing items to sell to people looking for a bargain. She became a pillar of our congregation, yet she slept at the train station when the police did not chase her away.

Finally a letter came from the city, and because I was watching out for her mail I noticed the letter from the Yonkers Housing Authority. When she opened it, she did not know what it meant. Without our relationship, this woman would not have understood that the city was offering her subsidized housing. This pillar of our congregation now lives in an apartment. She said she intends to nominate me for pope.

How We Love Like Jesus

The people who experience homelessness are, above all else, people. Yes, they may have challenges such as addiction and mental illness, just like anyone’s child might. The first truth, however, is that they are our friends. The second is that most of our assumptions about people need to be challenged by actually getting to know people. My experience was that frequently the people experiencing an issue had a much better sense of what was needed than the good-willed people who did not listen.

When you support an agency that provides services to people experiencing homelessness, you are not just offering a much needed support; you are also providing opportunities for the voice of the unhoused to be heard and understood. Not all of us can spend time getting to know our neighbors in need. If you can, I assure you it is worthwhile. All of us can, however, [support organizations](#) that make a difference in people’s lives, and in so doing show our love of Jesus.



The Rev. John M. Hamilton (he/they) serves as Secretary on the ECF Board of Directors and is the Rector of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Episcopal Church (Dahlonega). He is also the chaplain of the Episcopal Campus Ministry at the University of North Georgia Dahlonega Campus, the dean of the Georgia Mountains Convocation of the Diocese of Atlanta, Secretary of the Community Helping Place Board, and secretary of the Dahlonega Lumpkin County Ministerial Association. John's goal in ministry is to help those who work to uncover the relevance of spirituality in general, and following Jesus in particular, as relevant in a world which should and will constantly be changing. [Learn more about the ECF Board of Directors](#)

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