



The Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara

Rev. Aaron McEmrys, Parish Minister
Rev. John Alexie Crane, Minister Emeritus
Nancy Edmundson, Director of Administration
LeeAnn Williams, Director of Lifespan Religious Education

January 26, 2010

Santa Barbara County
Board of Supervisors

Dear Supervisors Farr, Wolf, Carbajal, Gray and Centeno,

I am writing on behalf of the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara. As you may know, we provided nighttime shelter for dozens of homeless men and women during the recent winter rainstorms in two classrooms on our campus. These “warming rooms,” staffed by volunteers organized by Dr. Lynne Jahnke, offered safe, warm and quiet nighttime refuge for some of our county’s neediest residents. These rooms have no beds and simple access to basic restrooms with no bathing facilities. We have housed 25 individuals every evening, and have served 40 total, with the balance of individuals sleeping out of doors under building eaves and overhangs. Others have been turned away.

As you are well aware, Santa Barbara County has a large—and growing—number of homeless residents. In spring, summer and fall, it is easy to ignore this epidemic. The temperate weather allows us to pretend that we don’t have a problem in this community; homeless members of our community literally slip into the shadows and under the radar. Winter rains and chilly weather brings these folks out of the woodwork, and makes it clear that our county sorely lacks emergency shelter, mental health services, substance abuse programs and other services homeless residents desperately need.

As a community of faith, our Unitarian Universalist congregation’s desire to help and our direct action are based on our affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of all people and of our fundamental interdependence as human beings. As an individual congregation with other faith communities and other nonprofits we cannot be first line service providers. Primary responsibility must remain with the county and city. We are prepared to play a supporting role in the effort to address the needs of these under served residents, and we recognize that we are unable and unwilling to do it alone. We strongly encourage Santa Barbara County and the Board of Supervisors to take the lead in this effort.

I would like to meet with you, your staff or commission members to assist you in meeting your responsibility of serving these residents of our community and county and to discuss how to partner more effectively in responding to and ultimately abolishing homelessness.

I thank you for your immediate and ongoing attention to this social service crisis in our community.

Sincerely,

Rev. Aaron McEmrys
Parish Minister

CC: Nancy Edmundson, Director of Administration x225