

For my homily today I'm going to ask you for something really big. But first, I want to tell you about some exciting developments in the New Bethlehem story. For those of you who are new to the parish let me give some history. A few years ago, as part of our Holy Family Five Year Pastoral plan, we decided as a parish that we wanted to make a bigger impact in our community by reaching out to those in need. In December 2014 some of us got together to discern what that could look like. We discovered there was a need on the Eastside for an emergency shelter for families with minor children who were homeless. There were shelters for single men and single women, but no dedicated place for the families of the over 600 homeless children in the Lake Washington and Bellevue school districts. Next, the Holy Spirit guided us to Salt House Church – a Lutheran church on the other side of Lake Washington High School that had a bottom floor that wasn't being used. We partnered with them and St. Louise parish in coming up with a three-phase plan.

First step, we would create a day center at Salt House for our families. Two local churches were, between October and May, letting homeless families bed down in spaces they had promised to single women – if there was room that night. But there was no place for these families to be during the day and after school. We thought we could start our outreach by creating a place where families could take showers, wash clothes, do homework, eat meals provided for them, be safe – until they had to head out for the night shelters – sometimes a two bus-ride trip away.

In the spring of 2016 I came to you and asked you to make that idea a reality by renovating the basement of Salt House. You really came through. Other churches and individuals also contributed, but Holy Family parishioners donated by far the largest amount, \$420,000 -- not to mention literally hundreds of volunteers. In October of 2016 we opened the New Bethlehem Day Center Monday through Friday, 2:00 – 8:00 PM. Since then God has blessed us. New Bethlehem is going

strong. We have had over 700 different individuals use the Day Center. Some have come just once, most have come for many days. We have found stable housing for 55 families, because part of the Day Center's mission are the case workers helping the families get off the streets.

Phase two of our plan was to find the funds to extend the Day Center hours, and the months the night shelters could stay open. During the summer months these families slept in doorways or in cars. You've been so generous with your on-going donations that we trusted in the Holy Spirit and funded places for our families to sleep indoors throughout the summer – the first time that had ever happened. And now the Day Center is open six days a week.

But now comes the really exciting part. We are going for phase three, the final goal – building a dedicated, permanent building where all the functions of the Day Center and the over-night sleeping shelters can be combined in one place. If we could do that, these families with little kids wouldn't have to head out at 8:00 at night in the dark and rain

to take buses across the Eastside to the place where they could sleep on their mats for the night.

The eastside cities had planned to build two homeless shelters on the Eastside, one for single men in Bellevue, one for single women in Kirkland. But then came New Bethlehem. As their advocates, we asked, “What about the families?” Our question had power because we had already demonstrated the need and the commitment via New Bethlehem. The cities have listened. Plans have changed. Now instead of just a single women’s shelter in Kirkland there is a proposal to add a second floor to the building just for families with small kids. CCS will still operate the building – with Sophie Way subleasing their floor from CCS. The City of Kirkland has bought a piece of land from Salt House where that building can go up – if we all pitch in and contribute to the dream.

So, here’s my big ask. The Eastside cities, the county, and the state are looking at contributing towards the \$8.9 million cost of the building. But they asked us, the private donors, to do our part. The New

Bethlehem community has been asked to contribute \$1 million. That doesn't all have to come from Holy Family, but I said we could provide \$600,000. That may seem like a lot, but we can do it. Together we have that amount to give. Due to some very generous families in the parish we already have just under \$200,000 pledged. I am personally going to donate the equivalent of 10% of my yearly salary towards this project. I don't know how much you can give, all amounts are greatly appreciated. But I ask you to think big. Make your gift a statement of your belief. What does Jesus' command to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless look like in 21st century America? It looks like this. This is how we can live out His teaching.

This building is the culmination of our vision – the last push. There will continue to be the need for donations for the on-going operating costs of New Bethlehem. But if we can build this all-service, permanent homeless shelter the dream that began just three years ago will come to fulfillment. I think the Holy Spirit must want this because it

has all happened in such an incredible way. I know we can do this as a parish. Please be generous. You can give online at nbpshelter.org, or by using the envelopes in the pews today. Make your checks out to CCS, attention "Eastside Cares."

My biggest dream would be that New Bethlehem goes out of business, that there would come a day when there is no further need for an emergency shelter for homeless families on the Eastside. But that day has not yet come. At Bethlehem Jesus, Mary, and Joseph slept exposed to the cold in a cave used as a stable. They needed emergency shelter that night in Bethlehem, but there was no place for them. Other children of God are still knocking on the doors of the inn – and still sleeping exposed to the elements. This project is the way I believe the Holy Spirit wants us to answer their knock. Let's build a bigger inn.