

ADDRESSING HOUSING INJUSTICES IN CREATIVE NEW WAYS

by Dean Steve Thomason

SAINTE Mark's Cathedral is located in a neighborhood that, during the early and mid-twentieth century, was subject to redlining by lenders and restrictive deed covenants on real estate ownership that enforced racial and ethnic discrimination. Disparities in housing access and generational wealth persist in our city and in the neighborhood where the cathedral was built nearly a century ago. In its Affordable Housing project on the St. Nicholas property just north of the main cathedral building, Saint Mark's has a unique opportunity to go beyond words and repent and repair the harm and injustice of housing disparities.

The Washington State Housing Finance Commission, which administers bonds and tax credits that largely fund affordable housing projects, encourages Community-Based Organizations (CBO) to guide culturally responsive engagement with communities that have been harmed by such housing injustices. Saint Mark's has long been committed to the work of restorative justice and now seeks to establish Saint Mark's CBO, which will guide a range of efforts in our housing and hunger ministries while also collaborating more intentionally with BIPOC and other communities harmed by historic injustices and by the Church's complicity in them. This new 501(c)(3) community-based organization is envisioned as guiding Saint Mark's by:

- ♦ Cultivating new leadership—a CBO Executive Director and a new CBO board, a majority of which is comprised of members from communities most impacted.

- ♦ Encourage truth telling and acknowledging historic traumas related to housing injustices through engagement, education, and advocacy with CBO Board of Directors, Vestry, cathedral parish, Diocese of Olympia, neighborhood, civic leaders, and the broader PNW community.

“SAINT MARK'S HAS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO GO BEYOND WORDS AND REPENT AND REPAIR THE HARM AND INJUSTICE OF HOUSING DISPARITIES.”

- ♦ Guide the portfolio of Housing and Hunger Ministries at Saint Mark's Cathedral in wholistic, collaborative and synergistic fashion.
- ♦ Design and develop a “third place” in the affordable housing project and administer/oversee the operational features

of that space to ensure access to services there are designed to address interactions among constituencies (communities harmed, cathedral, neighborhood, etc.).

- ♦ Deepen the partnership with nearby Lowell Elementary School staff, teachers and families (Lowell's student body is 25% unhoused, and 30 languages are spoken in the school).

Saint Mark's hope is that the cathedral's affordable housing project can become a hub of community support, resources and stability for more than 100 households, including families with children. The housing community is designed to be intergenerational with at least 35% two-and three-bedroom apartments to accommodate families with school-aged children. Moreover, it is believed that this CBO model may be replicated in other congregations across the nation seeking to address housing disparities in restorative and reparative ways. ♦