

Opinion

Herring: The yearning in all of us for a place to call home

By Linda K. Herring/Guest Columnist

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We all yearn for home – for a place to feel secure and safe, with a sense of belonging. From the tiniest apartment to a grand estate, home can bring comfort and peace to its residents.

How can we help individuals and families in our communities with no place to call home?

The word homeless is defined as “having no home or permanent place of residence.” According to the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, the number of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Massachusetts remains very high. It actually has more than doubled since 1990. A lack of adequate affordable housing is cited as a driving force behind the rise in homelessness in our state. Poverty also contributes heavily to this condition.

Caring groups and individuals continually step up to tackle these issues. Some focus on raising money or tapping into available government resources, while others provide shelter and services to those in need.

- On Feb. 27, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless hosted “Legislative Action Day 2018” at the State House. Anti-homelessness advocates flooded in to ask for more funding. One governmental program, Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), provides short-term financial assistance to families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

- On March 29, in downtown Natick, international speaker Heloisa Gelber Rivas gave a public talk that offered a spiritual perspective on the issue of homelessness. Her inspirational address, “Stranger, you are the guest of God,” was sponsored by First Church of Christ, Scientist, Natick.

- On April 7, Family Promise Metrowest (FPM) sponsored its 9th annual “Walk to end homelessness,” raising over \$165,000 to support its goals. FPM became operational in 2008, providing shelter and support to a few homeless families in the community. Since then, the organization has initiated comprehensive programs to provide transitional assistance and employment support to the families it serves.

Members of the Wellesley Congregational Church and the Christ Lutheran Church of Natick first conceived the idea for Family Promise in 2003, and the faith community is still a core component. Said Judy Mongiardo, an FPM founder, “Today we number fifty houses of worship (churches, temples, and a mosque) who are the foundation of our shelter program. One cannot overestimate the significance of this interfaith cooperation.”

These wonderful efforts are helping people find a sense of home. Can the faith community assist in other ways? Heloisa Rivas certainly believes it can. As she explained in her free talk, “There are no empty spaces where the divine presence is not governing. The power of good is already there, so we hope, which is praying. Good is God. When we acknowledge and trust good, we pray, and every prayer is answered.”

Rivas described home as the consciousness of God, rather than a place, though it can result in right housing. Years ago, she and her husband found an affordable house in Boston when it seemed impossible. While praying, she said they “looked for a home that served us so we could be of service.”

Surely, all those who hope in, acknowledge, and trust good can find home.

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