

**Pastor's Notes: Helping the Poor in Our Community: Part 2 of 3**

January 31, 2021

On Jan. 12, 2021, Fr. Carter interviewed Dr. Jimmy Turner, Basilica parishioner and Chief Operations Officer of Chattanooga Community Kitchen, a social service provider that is here to meet those most basic needs of hungry, homeless, and vulnerable people in our community, while also offering them a clear path to self-sufficiency. Part 2 of excerpts from the interview is presented below.

**Fr. Carter: What are the causes of homelessness?**

**Dr. Turner:** In my experience, the cause of homelessness is what we would call a breakdown in the family unit. And that doesn't just mean the nuclear blood family. That means the support network for a person. Because if I became homeless today, I have parents, I have siblings, I have neighbors, I have co-workers and colleagues, I have in-laws, who would all catch me and say, "Here, come, come take my spare room, come stay in our bonus room, come sleep on my couch, to protect me from being on the streets." The folks that we encounter have either walked away from that support network or been turned away from that support network. And so that's the underlying issue that we find now, what causes that can be a combination of things. It can be no fault of their own, everybody in their support network has died, they moved to a new town to restart and everything fell apart on them. And they really have no one to turn to. It could be that they aged out of the foster system and literally have no one to turn back to. It could be that their mental health became too much of a burden for the people who were there to take care of them. And the system isn't set up to catch everybody like we'd like it to be. It could be that their drug use or alcohol abuse or criminal behavior caused them to be isolated from that support network because they turned their support network into their victims. So there's a lot of pieces that that come out of it. But ultimately, it's that lack of a support network that break down to the family unit that causes homelessness.

**Fr. Carter: So what can we do to help alleviate the causes of homelessness?**

**Dr. Turner:** Well, the most important thing is to make sure that we see each other as people. We all have intrinsic value because we are made in the image of God. We are the pinnacle of creation. And the more that we treat people like the pinnacle of creation, the more that we establish for each individual in our network, that we are part of their support network. And so the best way to eliminate homelessness is to prevent homelessness.

**Fr. Carter: Could we also refer them to some other agency? And what are those agencies in town that can help people?**

**Dr. Turner:**

- **The Chattanooga Community Kitchen** - We serve three meals a day, every day. We have a day center for people to come in. And they can use our physical address to get an ID to check mail. We have a clothing store where they can come in, no questions asked, and get a change of clothes that won't cost them anything. We have a family shelter for families, the moment that they become homeless, that they can have a place to go where the family stays together.
- **Metropolitan Ministries** is there for homeless prevention. And so if you're in that situation where you can't make your rent and you're facing eviction, you go see them, and they're going to help you to avoid that. They're going to help you to keep your power on. It's not better for you to go sleep in your car where you have heat than to sleep in your home where you don't. So that's a great agency for you.
- **La Paz** is there really for the Hispanic community to help them with most of those social needs that they're going to come across.
- **Welcome Home of Chattanooga** is for those people who have no one to care for them and no ability to receive hospice care for their end-of-life transition.
- **Mustard Tree Ministries** operates at First Centenary United Methodist and First Baptist Church to provide meals and connect people to other resources that they might need, like travel arrangements or rehabilitation.
- **The Volunteer Behavioral Health Center** - their crisis unit for somebody who is facing a mental health break, accepts walk-ins.
- Call the **police** and ask for what we call a **CIT officer** (Crisis Intervention Trained officer). They know how to deal with people in the middle of a mental health crisis. And then, if substance abuse is part of that, they can be assessed for what we call a charity bed to get into a local rehab center, at no cost to them.

**Fr. Carter: Is it as simple as just going and getting a job, or is it a process to get people off the street?**

**Dr. Turner:** Everything is a process. To get a job, you have to fill out an application, and you have to have identification... a physical address... either a birth certificate or Social Security card. If you're homeless, you're not carrying all your important life documents... and these things can take time... We got to come up with \$12 or \$18 to take you down and actually pay for that ID to be made for you. We also have to find a way to get you down to the courthouse or the DMV to get that ID. Then, we have to figure out your skill set to try and find you the right job. And for somebody who has a criminal background... we need to find an employer who's willing to work with that, as well as a location where you're legally allowed to work.... For some people, it's a real challenge.

*The interview will continue in next weekend's pastor's notes. The full interview will be available on the Basilica's website along with Fr. Carter's Pastor's Notes for Jan. 24, Jan. 31, and Feb. 6, 2021, accessible at [stspeterandpaulbasilica.com/pastors-notes](http://stspeterandpaulbasilica.com/pastors-notes).*