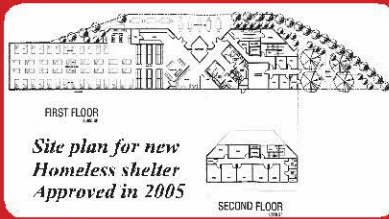


# TURLOCK CLOSES AND SELLS ITS HOMELESS SHELTER



Tonight I sat with my son, Jon, he is 10 years old. I read him the newspaper articles about Turlock closing and selling the homeless shelter and the letter to the editor "What Would Jesus Do"?

I asked my son what he thought Jesus would do if he was here. My son simply said, "If Jesus was here he would stop all this nonsense and keep the homeless shelter open!"

At some point, we have lost the simple faith that guides the hearts of our children. I was thinking about all the grand city buildings and churches we have. How fortunate we are to have comfortable, clean, air conditioned and heated places to worship.

As I thought about Jon's response; his use of the word nonsense seemed a little mature. I wondered if he understood what the word meant. When I asked Jon to tell me what the word nonsense meant; to my surprise he knew what it meant. So, the next logical question was why he thought this issue was nonsense. Jon told me because what I said wasn't right.

I spent sometime speaking with members of our city, a few of the service agencies that have manned the shelter in the past, as well as a few local business owners I know. I asked a lot of questions. At the end of my adult conversations, I had concluded that the reasons we have for closing the shelter, are in fact nonsense as my son Jon had said.

If Jesus visited Turlock, like in the time of the New Testament, I wonder which great building he would chose to visit. Where would we go to meet him? Would we meet Him in a church, city hall, maybe the auditorium, or at one of our homes?

I don't think so. I think we would find Jesus at the buildings he instructed us build. What buildings would win the prize, where would our Lord visit us? Today, we would find Him standing in front of our homeless shelter. In the eyes of our Savior, there is no greater building in our town than those built to help the sufferings of others. No public building, church, temple or synagogue is greater in the sight of our Lord than the homeless shelter or the other buildings we have to ease the suffering of our brothers and sisters. These buildings that help those in need stand as a testament of our faith thanksgiving and love. Do any of us doubt this? Who believes Jesus gives any honor, or assigns any value to the things we find valuable in this world?

I empathize with the local residents and businesses that have to deal everyday with people sleeping in their door ways or worse. But, to blame the homeless is misplaced.

Our city received money to buy the homeless shelter and made plans in 2005 to remodel and complete this project. Yes, I've seen the plans and budgets. I don't know why the plans were never followed through. But, I do know that they should be!

I am sure no one did anything wrong. I just don't think any of the homeless people in our town have a voice that was heard. They are like the poor man Jesus taught us about, coming to church in poor clothes and because of the way he looked, he sat in a poor place, while the rich man sat at the head in a grand place of honor. Jesus is no respecter of persons and has told us not to be either. "But for the grace of God, there goes I"!

What is the answer? Pull out the plans that were drawn up in 2005 and dust them off. These plans would move the homeless to the shelter the city bought for them on B Street. Down the block further into the industrial area as planned, near other services for them that are already there. We need to clean up the place and put in some showers and bathrooms and make a park like place behind the building (as planned) with shelter and shade to rest, off of the streets.

Part of the project should include a maintenance and invitation crew that twice daily walks the neighborhood and invites the homeless from downtown to come to B Street to cool down, warm up, shower or get some sleep. And, also, cleans up any and all the neighborhood of debris. The local businesses and residents also deserve a break and help.

Money? It doesn't seem to be an issue. The city was given the money to buy the shelter and in 2005 had the money to upgrade it. Let us all make sure the city knows we want them to simply do the right thing.

Spending money to extend the fence around the city parking lot so no one can rest on the grass is not even a band-aid! It simply moves the problem from one place to another. Let's stop pushing people back and forth like some childish game of hot potato!

In all my years, I have never seen a problem get better by ignoring it or by moving the problem to another person's neighborhood. Those who think "Turlock shouldn't be in the homeless business" are simply ignorant of the fact that Turlock is already in the homeless business and by ignoring it Turlock will actually be committing unlimited resources to it. Who knows what it is actually costing local businesses or will cost.

I have never seen poverty, starvation and sleep deprivation bring out the best in anyone. A good management program not only fulfills our moral obligation to our fellow man, but, gives the neighboring residents and business some hope of relief and help. That has to be better than what's happening now!

Let's stop the attack on the homeless and those that give so much of their time to help the homeless. I have met some wonderful people that spend their days helping the homeless. There are people to do the work.

Many times I walk past someone asking for a hand or don't stop my car to help someone that looks like they need help. But, sometimes I do stop and help. The times I do stop to help are when I feel a tug at my heart. I have shared this with my children so that they know we supposed to do something to help. For me this is simply one of those times. As I hope it is now for you also. All that you need to do is simply stand up and be present and counted. .

Please add your voice and ideas with letters to the editor or the Turlock Journal and to the Mayor and City Counsel Members. Please just let them know what you think. Everyone I have spoken to possess a warm caring heart. We all need to just tug on it a bit to get everyone to do the right thing.

Here is what I have found to be true. There is a place for the shelter, with a shelter on it that was paid for with federal money. It is close to other services for the homeless. There is a plan to improve the shelter with federal money. There are people to man the shelter. Turlock is already in the homeless business and paying money to help. The local businesses and residents are being neglected.

At the end I am left to simply conclude there is no reason I have heard that has any merit for not having the homeless shelter as planned. I have found many reasons that by not having the shelter is a big mistake. It is morally a mistake for you and me to allow suffering when we can help it. It is a mistake to play hot potato with people. It is a mistake to not have a plan. It is a big mistake to ignore it.

What can you do? Five minutes and a stamp to write a letter to the city counsel, the editor of the paper or come to the counsel meetings, speak if you feel inclined, or bring a simple piece of paper to hold up that says "What Would Jesus Do". I really believe this is the right thing to do and that we can make a difference and help.



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