



HOUSING FOR THE POOR

a non-violent campaign

I was a stranger
and you took me in.
I say unto you,
in as much as you have done it
unto the least,
you have done it unto me.



Emergency Shelter for Evicted Families

On any given day in Washington hundreds of people are sleeping in parks, boarded-up buildings and empty cars. In 1975 alone, there were 2,260 families evicted from their homes. Because of the pressures of speculation and renewal, and the considerable impact of broad economic forces and unemployment in a city with many poor residents, the eviction rate has increased more than 600% in the last year. Thousands are homeless.

The assistance offered to evicted families by the city is wholly inadequate—a few days shelter at a motel for some, nothing for most. The District government operates only two emergency shelter facilities, with a maximum capacity of 10 moderate size families each. In the rawness of winter, clusters of the homeless can be seen hovering over fires burning in barrels or garbage cans in vacant lots and alleys. Each year people freeze to death due to lack of shelter.

This crisis situation exists in the face of thousands of abandoned buildings owned by the D.C. Redevelopment Land Agency and absentee landowners. The city holds the deed to an estimated 5,000 vacant houses. These buildings are not just symbols of physical decay, they are monuments to moral, economic and political evil. More than that—they are a taunt, a jeer in the face of the homeless.

Living and working along the Northwest 14th Street riot corridor, where the impact of city housing policies is devastating, the Community for Creative Non-Violence has undertaken a response. Beginning last April, CCNV has proposed, negotiated and campaigned actively for the transfer of title to a multi-family 38-room abandoned building, or a comparable structure in the area, from the city's Department of Housing and Community Development into a neighborhood land trust. The property would then be rehabilitated, staffed and funded by CCNV with its own

money and labor as an emergency shelter for evicted families—returning it to the property tax rolls after nine years of disuse.

As reported recently by a prominent Washington newspaper columnist: "The house has become more than a potential shelter for the poor. It is a symbol of all the abandoned houses in the city that mock the needs of citizens."

The Neighborhood Land Trust

Washington faces a housing crisis of major proportions, and one which must be alleviated by long-term solutions. It is estimated that 77,000 people are living in substandard, over-crowded housing. The city has one of the tightest and most expensive housing markets in the country. The occupancy rate is 99%, while HUD defines a 95% rate as critical. The housing market is clearly a seller's market, with ability to acquire based on ability to pay.

The Columbia Heights neighborhood is located in the heart of the riot corridor—a desolate area, pock-marked with abandoned buildings and empty lots. Fully 34% of the neighborhood is owned by the city, while 55% is owned by absentee landlords. Located near the Federal Triangle, the area is suffering from intense development pressure facing some of the only vacant property left in the center city. Developers and speculators are becoming increasingly active in investment, eviction and demolition.

In addition to controlling a vast amount of primarily boarded-up buildings, the city's policy of selling packages of property to real estate developers intensifies the problem. Further, available public housing does little to meet the needs of low-income families, while short-term rent subsidies provide little security to those who can afford what is available.

In response, CCNV has been instrumental in the recent establishment of one of the nation's first urban land trusts—the Columbia Heights Community Ownership Project, Inc. The four primary purposes of the Trust are: 1) to halt real estate speculation in the neighborhood before a major transformation of rent levels and sale prices occurs, by taking abandoned or low-cost housing off the market; 2) to demonstrate that land and housing are not commodities to be bought and sold, but are the right of all; 3) to provide low-cost adequate housing for low-income residents of the neighborhood; and, 4) to place the control of the future of the neighborhood in the hands of the residents through community ownership of resources.

The trust is composed of a Board of Directors of

neighborhood residents, community leaders and Trust leaseholders, with an open general membership and democratic structure. The Trust recently purchased its first property which is undergoing major rehabilitative work, primarily with volunteer resources. The home will then be leased to a neighborhood family in need of low-cost housing.

The Trust will hold title to the property. Trust tenants will be given a 99-year renewable lease, with monthly payments based on their ability to pay and the Trust's ability to subsidize. Equity will be accrued in the form of security of permanence in their home, and a portion of all payments will be set aside for relocation or emergency expenses. Alternative means of financing made possible the purchase of the first property and are being developed as a primary resource for additional acquisition and rehabilitation.

This unique perspective toward relationship with the land and neighbors is summarized in the Statement of Purpose: "Community ownership of land...stands firmly rooted in the traditions of Native Americans and African tribes, and it also has strong spiritual ties to Biblical concepts. The land was here long before our birth, and it will remain when we are no longer a memory. It is our responsibility to care rationally and humanely for this vital natural resource entrusted to us. Like the air and the water, the land is held commonly by us all. It is to be respected, to be used as needed with wisdom and concern for those with whom we share it, now and in the future."

Only when full control and title of property are vested, in perpetuity, in the collective hands of the community can there ever be any real security for the poor, or any real stability and continuity in the development of neighborhoods. The greater vision to be realized through the common stewardship of the land by those who use it is the development of a neighborhood governed by a set of cooperative values.

A Non-Violent Campaign for Housing

Last June, the Department of Housing and Community Development rejected the proposal for an emergency shelter, referring to the "precedental effect" in accepting—as well as their unwillingness to release a property that would bring in "less than the fair reuse appraisal value." In August, five persons were arrested during two non-violent occupations of the proposed shelter in attempting to enter the property to begin the necessary rehabilitation work. This followed weeks of leafletting city employees, meeting with city officials, and the circulation of a neighborhood petition in support of the proposal that was signed

by over 1,000 persons. Further direct action was postponed in order to facilitate renegotiation.

Over 50 community organizations have endorsed the proposal, among them the City-Wide Housing Coalition, National Catholic Conference for Inter-Racial Justice, Metropolitan Washington Planning and Housing Association, Gray Panthers, Campaign for Human Development, PUSH, the Downtown Cluster of Congregations, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, United Farmworkers, Washington Area Clergy and Laity Concerned, Citizens Action Group—as well as other churches, and student, housing and religious groups. Individual support has come from four City Council members, Dick Gregory, Ralph Abernathy, and Dorothy Day. The media has continued to focus favorably on the campaign.

By the end of October, no significant progress had been made. November brought more negotiations and a cancelled date of decision by the city. By mid-December the delay persisted—DHCD continued to deliberate with no great haste. CCNV's sense of urgency and impatience grew as Washington was experiencing one of the coldest winters in over 50 years.

On December 9, the Community notified the Department of Housing that if the city had not



made a decision by January 7, or if it was a negative one, the public campaign would be renewed and continue until resolution. If it becomes necessary, on January 7th four persons will set up cardboard boxes in front of city hall, to live there until the campaign is ended. It will be an attempt to make visible and concrete what has become invisible and abstract—to portray the life that many are forced to live, some in as meager of accommodations as an old overcoat and a box for shelter.

Leaflets will be distributed in front of the housing and city government offices prior to the 7th, and support from around the city and elsewhere will be mobilized. Already, Sojourners Fellowship, an ecumenical Christian community in northwest Washington, has pledged its support for the shelter proposal along with CCNV and will be working closely with the campaign.

A major focus of the campaign in raising the issues of homelessness and city housing policies will be to strongly encourage individuals and institutions to respond to this crisis situation by taking the personal responsibility to help provide temporary housing. CCNV and Sojourners Fellowship will serve as a clearinghouse for housing assistance and facilitate the opening of church basements, school rooms, and private homes to those with no shelter.



An Invitation to respond

We need your assistance. During the past nine months that CCNV has been working on this campaign, the support from others has greatly sustained our efforts. As we enter into the most important phase of the campaign, we look to that same kind of warm response and ask you to consider assisting us in any way you are able. We offer some suggestions:

Write letters of support to the following persons. Send us a copy and let us know if you wish to be kept up-to-date on the campaign.

Lorenzo Jacobs

Director, Department of Housing and Community Development

*1325 G St., NW, Room 959
Washington, DC 20005*

Walter Washington
Mayor

*The District Building
14th and E Sts., NW
Washington, DC 20005*

We need your financial support. Money is desperately needed. A contribution now, however small, would be greatly appreciated and would help to continue our work.

Could you join the campaign for a day, a week, a month, for the duration? If you share some of our excitement over the potential of the campaign and neighborhood land trust, why not consider joining us here in Washington? We have lots of work that needs to be done: organizing, leafletting, and continuing the work on the house being rehabilitated.

We also look for your input—any thoughts, ideas, criticisms you may have and would like to share with us. We deeply appreciate your support and look forward to hearing from you.

In the midst of the struggle to establish an emergency shelter and neighborhood land trust, the Community for Creative Non-Violence is offering a set of two posters that reflect on the issues involved and will help to financially support the campaign.

Titled "Neighborhood Land Trust" and "A Campaign for Housing," they sell separately for \$3—both for \$5. Each 17½" by 23" original design poster is attractively printed on one of two shades of earth-tone quality paper.

The posters are shipped in sturdy mailing tubes; allow three weeks for delivery. When ordering, please designate which posters desired and make checks payable to CCNV.

POSTER

1345 Euclid Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

The Community for Creative Non-Violence is an idea that manifests itself differently in the lives of many in Washington. Some live in community at one of four houses; some gather to labor, to reflect, to struggle, to search. During the past six years CCNV has sought to live non-violence in a vital, creative way, seeking to confront violence and to heal the victims of that violence. The Community operates a free soup kitchen and hospitality house, a free medical clinic, and provides free housing and other assistance to those who have been arrested or are awaiting trial. CCNV is also involved in peace education, organizing for justice, and offering public resistance to policies of the United States government.

The Community for Creative Non-Violence owns no property, pays no taxes, and offers no salaries—depending upon the graciousness of those who labor freely, live poorly, and offer support physically, financially and spiritually. Recognizing a need to blend within the individual and the community the elements of spirituality, service, resistance, constructive program and the personal integration of justice, CCNV works to serve those who are victims of society and resist the policies that make them victims. Within that framework, the Community has undertaken this campaign for housing for the poor.

For more information:

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