

Congregation-Hosted Car Camping

Suggested Checklist

Living in their vehicle -- car camping -- is sometimes the only shelter option available for individuals or families who have recently fallen into homelessness. Around the country, congregations are considering offering space in their parking lots for such use. Areas that have developed actual programs include Santa Barbara CA, Eugene OR, and Kitsap County here in Washington.

Here are some issues to think about when considering offering car campers space.

Congregational procedures:

- Form ad hoc committee to do preliminary investigation of precedents, public health requirements, and possible municipal or neighborhood restrictions*
- Hold discussions regarding intent with organizational members/social action committee
- Talk with clergy to obtain their support
- Formulate written proposal
- Obtain approval of proposal by elected congregational leadership

Community Issues:

- Decide whether to ask for approval of nearby community individuals and organizations, or simply advise them of your congregation's intention
- Discuss whether possible linkages with neighboring faith communities would be helpful

Possible types of car camping programs:

- Basic level: One or two vehicles allowed on the parking lot; no other services provided
- Medium level: Car campers allowed to use outside water faucets; Porta-potty provided
- High level: Car campers allowed to use inside water/shower/toilet facilities; congregation provides resource information and personal counseling; limited meals and/or use of kitchen facilities

Suggested forms:

- Letter of Authorization from congregation re inclusive dates/times allowed for camping
- Code of Conduct signed by camper and congregational authority
- Card to be posted on vehicle when parked in congregation lot
- Name and phone number of emergency and business-hours congregational contacts

Suggested elements of Code Conduct to be signed by congregation and camper:

- No weapons allowed on premises (including weapons with legal permits)
- No drugs or alcohol consumed on premises
- No physical violence or verbal abuse of fellow campers permitted on premises
- No open flames allowed in vehicles or on premises
- No loitering outside vehicles or disturbing neighbors of congregation or fellow campers
- Daily check-in with congregation office

NOTE: If the congregation owns the parking lot, federal law (called "RLUIPA") will likely allow the congregation to use its property in whatever way it deems necessary to pursue its religious mission. Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, 2000
<http://www.rluipa.com/>