

## A Solution to PADS

Dear Fellow Concerned Parents,

All of us have seen how divisive this issue has become to our parish, and none of us are happy about it. I know most of the "concerned parents" feel angry, sad and betrayed. I'm sure those who support the homeless shelter - including Father Carl, feel the same. They are good people, just as we are. Like them, most of us strongly agree that we are obligated as Christians to help those in need. We simply disagree about whether or not a PADS shelter is dangerous to our children. It's that simple. At one of our first meetings with Father Carl, he asked us if we had an alternative suggestion. At the time, we didn't. Now, I think we may. Here is a preliminary version that I think may work.

1. We DO NOT INVOLVE the PADS people at all. Their screening is not satisfactory and their program has been dangerous in other towns. Their system only offers one night of undignified help and invites in homeless from other towns. PADS will increase the homeless population in Park Ridge. They are part of the problem, not part of the solution.
2. The Park Ridge Police Department would locate and identify the PARK RIDGE HOMELESS (which likely number 6-10 individuals). The PARK RIDGE HOMELESS are then fingerprinted to ensure that none of these individuals are a danger to us or our children.
3. Every church in PRMA would shelter one homeless person per night. This idea eliminates a large group assembling around a church before and after they are sheltered.
4. The homeless would be sheltered in the rectory or another location in the church, but not in an area used by children.
5. Volunteers (and there are many) would be scheduled to come to each location, actually meet the homeless person, and bring a warm meal. Many volunteers and their families may want to spend time with the guest, have dinner with them, and engage them in meaningful conversation. (Rather than just "supervise" them as PADS volunteers do.) This would be a great way to teach children about how to care for others.
6. An additional volunteer can take the persons clothing home to be washed and returned fresh and clean (something else that is lacking in the current plan.)
7. With this system, the homeless can also spend time with one of our priests and discuss our faith (something that is actually prohibited by PADS policy)
8. Unlike the PADS idea, the homeless would not be forced to share a bathroom with 10-20 other homeless people, or wait in line for a toilet.
9. A comfortable fold out bed can be purchased for the guest to sleep on, in a dignified location, rather than on a hard mat or cot on the floor of a gym.

10. The guest could have access to a shower, a television set, and caring people. The PADS system would require the homeless to wash themselves in a sink in the boys bathroom.

11. In the morning, the guest would have breakfast and leave - showered, wearing clean clothes, and feeling that they just spent time with good Christian people who truly care about them. Their experience would be far more meaningful and dignified than any PADS shelter could offer.

12. Finally, as the guest leaves, he would be told which church to go to that night. That would ensure that only one person shows up at each location. It also ensures that we take care of the Park Ridge homeless, and not people from Chicago and other suburbs.

Additionally, this program addresses the issue 7 days a week. PADS only addresses it for one day. This program spreads the homeless out at numerous churches, rather than a large number at one location.

Since it doesn't use the gym, there would be no reason for the church to obtain a Special Use Permit or enter into a long drawn out legal battle with the Village.

If Father Carl agrees, I'm sure he could get the other members of PRMA to agree also. The long, ugly battle that has gone on for months now would be over well before school begins, and we can work on repairing the damage this issue has done to so many people.

As a parent, I would feel comfortable knowing that ONE homeless person (who has been background checked by the PRPD) was an overnight guest. As a Christian, I would be among the first to volunteer.