

Dear Parishioners, School Parents, Neighbors and Friends:

March 28, 2003

Early spring greetings of peace to you and your household. This letter is to communicate to you my decision about whether to invite Tent City to the St. Joseph campus this August 2003. After extensive consultation with the parish community, neighbors, and representatives of Tent City, and with the unanimous support of the Pastoral Council, **my decision is to invite Tent City here for July 2004.**

The Pastoral Council discussion about Tent City reviewed the full range of issues connected with Tent City's request to occupy the parish parking lot for a month. In favor of the request is the awareness that Tent City is a responsible self-governing community of the working poor. In addition to our other social justice ministries, it is another chance for the parish to fulfill our mission "to heed the urgent call of Christ in our times." It is an opportunity to promote diversity, to challenge stereotypes about the homeless, and to improve neighborhood relationships.

The Pastoral Council also noted difficulties. There are legitimate concerns about screening, supervision, security, safety, and liability. A number of neighbors asked whether the parish is sincere in wanting to be a good neighbor when nagging issues continue around parking congestion, noise, and litter. Clearly these concerns need attention whether or not the parish hosts Tent City.

The Pastoral Council wanted to welcome Tent City this summer, but August is a problem. The month of July is ideal because of compatibility with existing gym programs, the presence of parish families to host Tent City participants, and a mostly empty parking lot during school vacation. August has multiple requirements for the parking lot that would cause tensions for everyone. Since Tent City already has a contract this July 2003 at another location, the Council's choice was for next summer.

The discussion about Tent City makes me want the parish to be a better neighbor. Susan Fox, the Director of Jubilee Women's Center on 18th Avenue and Roy Street, has agreed to host some neighborhood gatherings in a neutral setting. I want the church and school to respond better to concerns about parking, traffic, noise, and safety. I want us to have two Neighborhood Liaisons -- one from the parish staff, one chosen from the neighborhood -- who are available and responsive to parish-neighborhood needs.

I am grateful for the time and energy everyone has brought to this discussion. In addition to opinions expressed at the February 20th evening forum, the parish received 68 written submissions, 47 in favor, 17 opposed, and 4 neutral. One letter challenging Tent City with the caveats noted above contained 42 signatures. I particularly appreciate the Tent City representatives, Seattle Police, and members from other Tent City hosting communities who spoke at the forum. Their information that 17 communities have hosted Tent City without incident and have discovered new bonds of belonging with one another proved heartening.

Some from the parish will be disappointed that we cannot host Tent City this summer – especially since the parish's Homelessness Committee has been wanting to welcome Tent City for the past two years. While the Pastoral Council would have liked to host Tent City this summer, the Council expressed gratitude that there will be more preparation time. It will enable us to mend some fences with neighbors, and help identify parishioners who will commit to welcome Tent City next July 2004.

With thanks for your kindness and support,

**Rev. Craig Boly, S.J.
Pastor**