



Social Justice

Emergency Residence Project

High rental rates and low vacancy rates in Ames have combined to make things “really, really grim” for those with low incomes, according to Vic Moss, director of the **Emergency Residence Project (ERP)**. Ames, along with Iowa City and West Des Moines, ranks in the top three for rent costs. With increased enrollment at Iowa State, rental vacancy rates are below 3%, keeping costs high and landlords unlikely to take chances on low-income renters. Usually, the affordability standard is that rent plus utilities should not exceed 30% of household income. In Ames, using that standard, Moss said a single wage earner at minimum wage would need to work 79 hours per week to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the 2011 fair market price of \$740/month plus utilities.

ERP (also known as “the homeless shelter”) served 2178 people last year, the vast majority of them Story County residents and approximately half of those children. ERP has several programs: **1) Emergency (short-term) shelter.** Emergency shelter is either in the main shelter at 225 S. Kellogg or at a local motel, which has the lowest rates in town. Short-term stay is usually no longer than two weeks; 718 people were helped with this in 2011. **2) Transitional housing.** The average stay in the family apartments is about nine months. Last year, 38 people in nine families were helped in transitional housing. **3) Homeless prevention.** In 2011, ERP helped 532 households prevent eviction, secure new housing after eviction, prevent the loss of utilities, or restore service. According to court records and several agency statistics, the number of households vacated under duress (either with threatened or completed eviction) probably reaches 1,000 per year in Story County.



Vic Moss

The staff at ERP also provides other assistance, including referrals for food, clothing, employment, medical care, and long-term housing. Time is also spent on advocacy and work with other groups to help with the needs of the homeless and other low-income people. A family service worker provides case management and support services for the transitional families.

According to Moss, many of those seeking shelter are the working poor. Some may have lost wages caring for a sick child; others have had their hours cut. For many, a lack of reliable transportation makes living in nearby towns (with more affordable rent rates) an unworkable option. The smaller towns have housing, but rarely have jobs. When an older car breaks down, it often means a job in Ames is lost and a downward cycle begins.

Although some have expressed concern about out-of-state people coming to Ames for housing, Moss said for the most part, that ended several years ago when the county established a six-month residency requirement for those getting rental assistance. He also pointed out that some

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SAINT CECILIA CONTACTS:

ALTERNATIVE GIFT MARKET.

1-800-842-2243 STC Contact: Cynthia Shriver 292-6584

AMOS. STC Contact: Kathy Wipf 232-6232

APPALACHIA WAREHOUSE, 2019 Pullman Street, Ames. STC Contact: Lynn Franco 232-0898

BIRTHRIGHT OF AMES, 108

Hayward Ave., Suite 202, Ames 515-292-8414. STC Contact: Kathy Ridnour 232-1697

CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAS. STC Contact: Sharon Jenkins 233-2570

EMERGENCY RESIDENCE PROJECT. STC Contact Jamie Hamilton 233-2499

FOOD AT FIRST, 516 Kellogg Ave., Ames. 515-344-4357 STC Contact: Doreen Berg 956-3414

GOOD NEIGHBOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE, INC., 3206 S. Duff, Ames 515-296-1449. STC Contact: Doreen Berg 956-3414

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF CENTRAL IOWA. 515-232-8815. STC Contact: Alan Christy 231-8099

MEALS ON WHEELS (Homeward), 1114 S. Duff, Ames. STC Contact: Cathy Kaspar 233-0517

OPERATION RICE BOWL. STC Contact: Cynthia Shriver 292-6584

PRISON MINISTRY. STC Contact: Ron Smith 382-5654

SAINT CECILIA SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE. STC Contact: Mary Ross 232-5080

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE. STC Contact: Garland Dahlke (515) 460-0403

(cont'd) made homeless by local housing costs are being served by programs in other locations.

The majority of those seeking shelter need long-term affordable housing, a very scarce commodity in Ames in 2012.

St. Cecilia makes a monthly donation to ERP through its Good Samaritan Fund (black bag collection). Mr. Moss characterized St. Cecilia as "our strongest" institutional supporter since ERP opened in 1985.



ERP, 225 South Kellogg

Patty Rua has been our St. Cecilia "social justice champion" since the mid 1980's. A group of parishioners met during that time at the home of Jerry and Elaine Dunn to discuss the needs of the poor in Ames. Most people in the parish did not realize that Ames had so many poor among us. Patty recalls saying to the group that St. Cecilia's was the largest faith community in Ames and we were doing the least for the poor. They did what they could and got involved with social justice issues as they heard about them.



Patty Rua

In the mid 1990's it was decided that in order to do more, someone from the group needed to go to the St. Cecilia's Parish Council with their concerns. The council suggested that a collection for the needy be taken periodically at St. Cecilia's. Envelopes for the special collection were printed. Then the question was how do we approach the parishioners and describe the needs of the poor and homeless in Ames? Patty invited Vic Moss director of the Ames Homeless Shelter to speak at all masses. Soon after Vic spoke, Patty spoke at masses and explained the special collection that would be taken – she asked people to give their extra pennies, dimes, dollar bills; whatever they could afford. As she said when recently interviewed, "we did pretty well" – people at St. Cecilia's are very generous and respond to needs! From then the Social Concerns committee (now known as the Social Justice Committee) was formed with Patty Rua as the chair. She was a tireless worker and the group took on more and more community needs. In 2003, black bags started being passed for the monthly collection.

We thank Patty for all she has done to make the St. Cecilia community one that makes us aware of others as we follow the beatitudes and follow the way of Christ.

The Saint Cecilia Social Justice Committee meets on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Sunroom. Everyone is welcome to attend. All donations are made in accordance with Catholic Social Justice teachings. Financial reports and budget information are available from the parish office.