



No Room At The Inn

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Jesus was no stranger to homelessness. He was born into it. The reality that there was no room at the inn (Luke 2:1-7) might be fondly recreated in our nativity scenes and Las Posadas, but I doubt Joseph and Mary were pleased.

My daughter gave birth last month. Even after their baby daughter is grown, the parents will tell the story of the twists and turns of the delivery and the strangeness of giving birth during a pandemic. I wonder if Jesus heard similar stories growing up. “Joseph and I traveled across the county for the census. Of course, *that’s* when you decided you couldn’t wait any longer. If you’d hung on for only one more week, Jesus, I could have given birth in the comfort of my own home and surrounded by family, but nooo....” [Add maternal guilt and sarcasm for effect.]

Jesus was born into homelessness that was anticipated to be temporary. Then came the flight to Egypt, and the homeless baby became a refugee escaping certain terror and death. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, and then wrapped in the desperation of new parents who’d do anything to save the child they loved, including fleeing to a foreign land. As we focus on [Housing](#) in the time before our March 9 Presbytery Gathering, it is fitting that we remember the nativity and flight to Egypt, not for their charm but for their harsh reality – a reality still faced daily by families made in God’s image.

The [Eviction Lab](#), a project of Princeton University, tracks evictions nationally and also focuses on 27 cities, including Milwaukee. Nationally, over 155,000 evictions were filed since the pandemic began. Last week alone, nearly 3,200 evictions were started. Wisconsin averages 40.63 evictions every single day. More than forty families in our state lose stable housing every...single...day.

Imagine trying to weather a pandemic and isolate in place when everything you own is thrown out onto the sidewalk and you’ve been locked out of your apartment. We know the skyrocketing unemployment rates caused by business closures during the pandemic, and evictions quickly follow. No job, no rent, no home, no safety. Children’s schooling is disrupted, and parents’ credit is tarnished, making it hard to find a new place. Landlords also feel the pinch: no rent, no mortgage payment, and foreclosures can follow.

People of color, who have been disproportionately excluded from home ownership, also bear the brunt of evictions. We find ourselves again at the intersection of poverty and racism, facing a seemingly insurmountable challenge. In Matthew 25:31-46, everyone acknowledged that the poor, sick, imprisoned, and strangers existed. The questions asked were: who saw the King in the faces of those people and acted?

Likewise, it is not enough for us to acknowledge the existence of strangers in our midst – those who have no home among us. We must recognize Jesus among them AND act. Presbytery Moderator Judy Jaggard spent time wrestling with these questions, with Tammie King-Johnson, a Leader with Mercyhealth overseeing the House of Mercy Homeless Center, a 25- bed emergency shelter in Rock County. [Their conversation](#) challenges the church to action. The [Housing](#) section of our website offers other ideas for action that help to provide immediate relief or development assistance. Advocacy for systemic change must accompany our relief efforts, so we give those options, too. Over the next few months, we’ll look at homelessness, housing insecurity, and housing discrimination, not because it’s a quaint scene we recreate at Christmas but because we are called every...single...day to welcome the stranger.

