

Homeless shelter repairs spur request for help

BY ROB SHAPARD, The Herald-Sun

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CHAPEL HILL -- Eleven local churches now have lined up to provide temporary, overnight space for homeless men starting next month, when the Inter-Faith Council shelter and kitchen on West Rosemary Street are scheduled to close for major repairs.

A 12th church, St. Joseph CME on West Rosemary, will serve lunch and supper seven days a week, and breakfast on Sundays. Other churches are supporting the effort in ways other than offering space, and the town of Carrboro will take a turn by providing shelter at the Century Center.

The churches and the Century Center each will make space available for up to two weeks at a time, with the Chapel Hill Bible Church on Erwin Road set to be the first.

"We feel energized by this," IFC Director Chris Moran said Friday. "We feel like there's even a renewal of sorts going on, among congregations and groups that are truly owning the problem of homelessness and want to respond to this challenge. We're grateful to everyone who is involved."

The town of Chapel Hill owns the shelter building on West Rosemary and leases it to the IFC on a two-year basis, for \$1 per year. The town plans to spend up to \$450,000 replacing the roof, windows and doors and making other significant repairs to the exterior of the building, which is about 65 years old and once served as town hall.

The work should take about three months, although the IFC has made arrangements with churches through early September. IFC and town leaders say the plan is for the shelter and kitchen to reopen in the West Rosemary building once the work is done.

At the same time, a planning group that includes local elected officials, IFC representatives, church leaders and business people has begun studying services for homeless citizens.

Among other issues, the group is looking at whether to find a new location in the future for the shelter.

The IFC's plan is to start moving out of the shelter on April 11, Easter Sunday, Moran said. The shelter's clients will sleep on inflatable mats there for two nights, then the Chapel Hill Bible Church will provide space from April 13 to April 22.

Moran said he's still fretting a bit about open dates on April 23 and April 24, and he's looking for help on those dates. The town of Chapel Hill is providing shower facilities at the Community Center on Estes Drive throughout the shelter closure, and Moran said he might ask the town about providing space for those two days in April.

The YMCA of Chapel Hill and Carrboro on Airport Road also has agreed to provide shower facilities.

The IFC held a fact and training session last week attended by about 60 volunteers and others interested in the temporary-shelter plans, Moran said. The group also plans to hold training sessions for volunteers from the individual congregations.

University Presbyterian on East Franklin Street is scheduled to provide space for one week in July and another in August. The Rev. Bob Dunham, pastor at University Presbyterian, said preparations were going well. His church will use its large fellowship hall as sleeping space.

"We've had a wonderful outpouring of volunteers so far," Dunham said Friday. "We believe we're going to be ready and set to go when the time comes, and the churches I've talked to have made good preparations. I'm really pleased that more and more congregations have become involved in a lot of different ways. I think we're going to be able to pull this off pretty well."

Dunham added that he thinks the effort is "something that seems to me is incumbent on the churches to do, in a time of need like this.

"I'm grateful that the response has been so positive," he said.

The other churches providing shelter are University United Methodist, Orange United Methodist, Binkley Baptist, St. Thomas More, United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel of the Cross, Amity United Methodist, First Baptist and University Baptist.

Moran also singled out Carrboro United Methodist, Cathedral of Hope, Cedar Grove United Methodist, Chapel Hill Christian Church, Chapel Hill Religious Society of Friends, Church of the Reconciliation, Holy Trinity Lutheran, St. Paul AME and the Community Church for thanks.

He said the IFC still is looking for volunteers to help with a range of needs, such as doing laundry a couple days a week or helping out at the smaller congregations providing shelter.

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