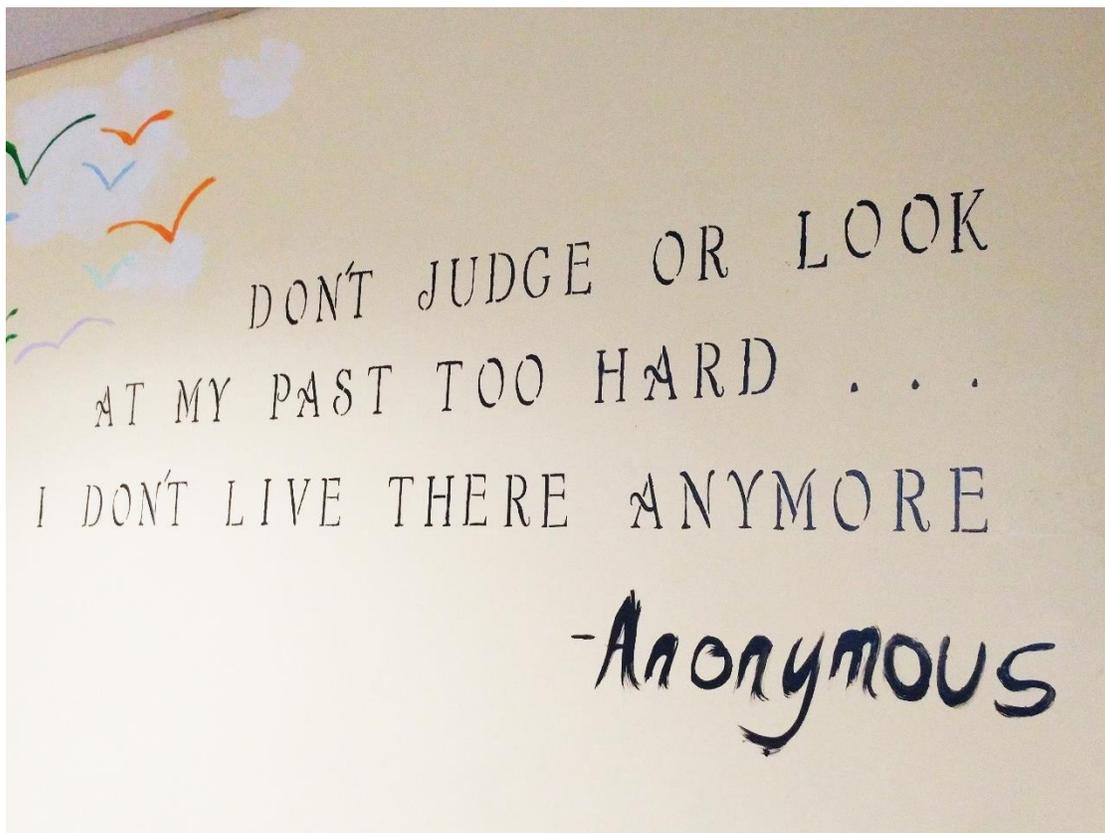


Reflection from General Synod 2017 – Baltimore, Maryland
Rev. Cindy Garis

First, many thanks to the Penn Central Conference, the Harrisburg Association and Faith UCC (New Cumberland) for the opportunity to serve as a General Synod delegate. You made it possible. I am proud to serve alongside of such faithful and deeply committed people.

Second, many of my fellow delegates did a beautiful job noting the numbers at Synod, the worship, the music, the resolutions and the preaching (see <http://conta.cc/2tkyvZI>). I want to share with you briefly about my participation in a service project called an Injustice Walk.

We began at Earl's Place, a transitional housing unit for me to help them get back on their feet (<http://umhousing.org/aboutus.htm>). While there, there was this quote on the wall...

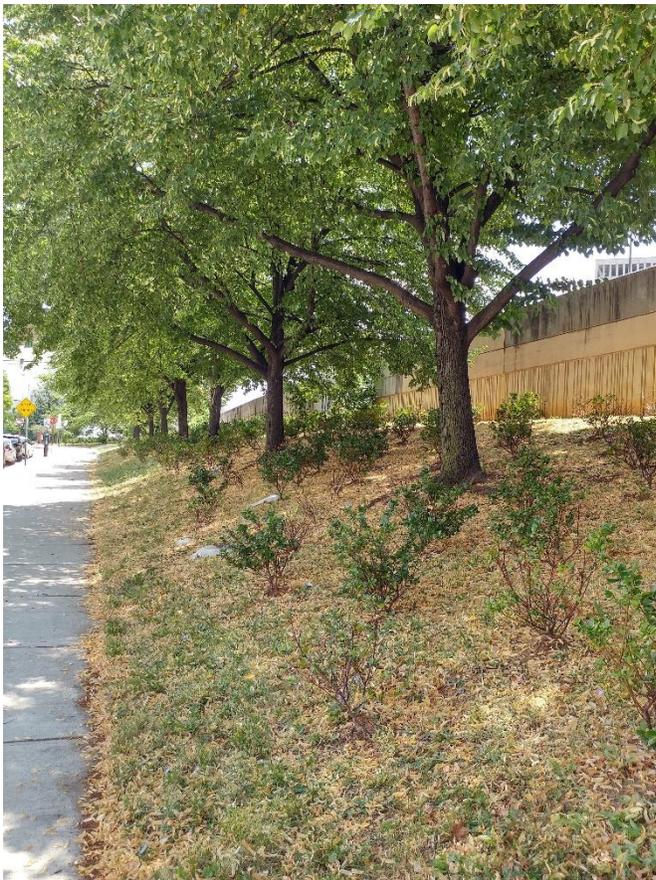


So many of us can say this as well. We heard from the Executive Director and one of the residents about the importance of transitional housing. Emergency shelters are important, but 30-day stays hardly give a person a chance to find housing, work and resources he needs to support himself. The resident shared about the difference it made for him to come to Earl's Place and be able to breathe again...to not have to

worry about where his next place to sleep would be. He has been able to experience recovery in his addictions and to go back to school to get a stable job.

After the brief introduction at Earl's Place, we ventured outside for a couple of hours/couple of miles walk around parts of Baltimore. Our guides were Tony and George from Baltimore's Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau. This group "challenges the deeply entrenched indifference many community members feel towards homelessness and poverty by engaging them in dialogues led by the true experts, those who have experienced it firsthand." (<http://facesofhomelessnessbmore.blogspot.com/>)

While on the walk, Tony and George pointed out areas where newly renovated low-income housing was working, where folks can find food and shelter, as well as places where folks are turned away and kept from sleeping.



If you are a hotel, how do you keep homeless people from sleeping under the trees across the street?

Keep shade trees trimmed high so that they don't offer much shade from the beating sun... oh, and plant holly bushes every 3-4 feet so that no one can lay on the ground. (see picture left)

Tony was asked about how one might respond to pan-handling by homeless people. He said he really did not like pan-handlers because it became the only face of homelessness that people see, and it is so much more than that. However, he did say that if you want to help them, help them. Give them money as you might in the offering plate – given to God generously and with an open heart. Or, give them a bag of travel-sized toiletries.

Our guides pointed out the difference in Baltimore between missions and shelters. There are only two city-run shelters. Missions are often run by religious organizations, and do not have to adhere to the same codes. There were some pretty sad and tragic stories.

For me, two bright spots on the trek were St. Vincent de Paul Church and the mural pictured below. "Since 1865, St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore has served people in our community who, for whatever reason, are being pushed, pulled, swayed or dragged

down by poverty. Our goal is to help each person, and our community as a whole, to move beyond poverty and achieve a better future for all.”

(<http://www.vincentbaltimore.org/>) Pretty amazing! And as we walked by, their Associate Pastor (on the sidewalk) introduced herself and said, “Please join us for mass in 15 minutes. **You are 100% welcome!**”

The mural below, we were told, was not done by one artist, but by numerous people who did small sections of it. It was very moving to me.



I think the Injustice Walk had such an impact on me, not because I lived and worked at a transitional unit in San Francisco years ago, but because I continue to hear Jesus say, “as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.” – offering food, clothing, water and shelter...this is when we demonstrate hospitality...not when we chase someone from sleeping on a park bench.