September 3, 2026

Dear friends,

Over the course of the spring and summer, The Breakfast Program has been experiencing a significant increase in incidents with disorderly guests, verbal and physical altercations, and generally disruptive behavior. We have had several conversations with the Ann Arbor Police Department, both with officers who regularly stop in at the Breakfast and with the community policing division. After extensive reflection, Sue Nishi (our Breakfast Program Director) and I decided to experiment with professional uniformed unarmed private security. We started on Sunday mornings (when we have an all-volunteer crew) about six weeks ago. Our experience was positive; the atmosphere in the dining room on Sundays was much calmer, and when there was an incident, the security guard was able to diffuse it quickly and interact with the police who responded. Security stays on campus until about 11:30 am, providing a sense of safety and serving as a resource for our ushers in the (fortunately rare) event of a disruption during worship.

A couple of weeks ago, we extended the experiment to Monday through Saturday. At the same time, we decided to enforce guidelines of no smoking, alcohol or drug use, loud music, or loitering on our grounds. The impact has been extremely positive: many fewer incidents, a much more peaceful and quiet atmosphere in the dining room, Sue and our volunteers freed up to focus on preparing and serving food, and much less trash discarded on our grounds and in the neighborhood. Additionally, multiple guests have thanked Sue and the security guards for being here, sharing that they feel much safer and well cared for; the volunteers also greatly appreciate the added sense of safety.

I want to emphasize that we have not undertaken this experiment lightly. My gut level inclination has been to let our guests, many of whom are experiencing homelessness and other significant challenges, hang out on our grounds as a means of providing some hospitality to a population with few places to go. What I have come to understand is that hospitality without real care behind it is not hospitable. In order to let our guests be on our grounds safely we would need to provide supervision, access to restrooms, and other services to ensure their health and safety: all things we are not prepared to do at this time.

We will continue to monitor and assess the situation and the effectiveness of this solution. This initiative does come with a financial cost, which fortunately, at the moment, the Breakfast Program is in a good position to absorb. As always, if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Peace,

Paul

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