

**Title:** “I planted; Apollos watered”: Stewards of the Mysteries of God to the Chronically Homeless

**Presenter:** Rev. Mark P. Braden, M.S., M.Div., S.T.M

**Thesis:** Although he may never see the outcome or fruits, the faithful Pastor nonetheless provides care of body and soul to the chronically homeless

**Particular problems to be addressed:** The Pastoral care of the homeless is made more difficult by the transient nature of the population. Causal in the different situations in which the Pastor ministers to the homeless are a variety of underlying adversities.

**The Dialogue / Case Studies:** “I planted; Apollos watered”, writes St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:6. “...but God gave the increase”, the Apostle continues, “So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” What St. Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians speaks directly to the Pastor who ministers to the chronically homeless. We frequently provide Pastoral care without the benefit of seeing the results, because the homeless population can be very transient. Nonetheless, the faithful Pastor, be he Called to an urban, suburban, or rural setting, takes every opportunity to speak Christ, and to treat the injured souls of those who lack food, clothing or shelter.

This paper will address the Pastoral care, or my best attempts at Pastoral care, of what may well be the most difficult subgroup of the general category “homeless” – those who are chronically homeless. I am an exegete. That is a curious affliction that renders otherwise normal men quite odd. That said, this author makes neither the claim that this paper is an academic paper, properly sourced and formatted; nor that this paper is an exegetical treatment of Biblical Truth, although Scripture must be the source and norm of our understanding of the care of souls of the homeless. It is my intention to function outside of my exegetical and academic disability in this paper, and provide rather an accounting of personal Pastoral experiences, together with conclusions that I have reached regarding them, in over 10 years of ministering to the “homeless” in the City of Detroit. None of the facts or circumstances recounted in this paper violate the Seal of the Confessional.

First, we should define the term “homeless”, although its *sensus literalis* is quite evident. “Homelessness” is a broad category with many subcategories. There are those who because of gentrification are forced to relocate, and may be temporarily in need of support or shelter before finding lodging affordable to them. This is certainly an issue in the section of Detroit in which I serve as Pastor. There are those whose homes have been destroyed by fire or severe weather. We have seen Zion members in such circumstances, as well as several Zion neighbors. There are the recently unemployed or recently evicted who, like the first two groups, may also need temporary support and shelter, and then given the needed help, are able to reestablish themselves and their families in different home. In many cases support from the congregational benevolence fund may be a great help to these families.

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

People in all of these circumstances may have enjoyed regular Pastoral care before becoming homeless, and seek that care during their tribulation. They may have home congregations, and can be served by their own Pastor, or by an urban Pastor who coordinates with their home Pastor in providing care and help. Such circumstances might also well drive those who have shunned the Church previously to seek Her help. Thanks be to God for that. His grace is sufficient, and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. I have ministered to several such families.

There is another group that should be considered – the migrant homeless. Without making any judgments on their motives or status, or on the legality of their presence, the fact is that in metropolitan Detroit, indeed in most American cities, there are many who have come to our country illegally, seeking either a better life or a place to do crime, and have not been able to establish themselves in a home.

It is commonly said that “no human being is illegal.” Scripture approaches the question quite differently – all human beings are illegal; in that they have broken God’s Law. The proper Pastoral approach to the immigrant begins there – with Law and Gospel. Assistance with food, clothing and shelter is frequently necessary. In Detroit many of these families “squat” in abandoned homes, which are plentiful, since the population of Detroit is just over a third of what it was in its heyday.

Such families and individuals create unique situations for the urban Pastor. I have worked with several such families, and am currently working with a family in which most of the members have been deported after arrests, leaving the remaining members in very difficult circumstances. Especially among the Hispanic community (I am bilingual) these homeless may have strong Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, or Jehovah’s Witness roots. My experience is that even before becoming settled in the city, they affiliate with congregations that share their nationality, even while seeking and accepting support from different groups.

Urban Pastors keep lists of soup kitchens, food banks, social service organizations, homeless shelters, mental health clinics, suicide prevention lines, clothing banks, medical facilities that provide indigent care, and other such organizations. Referring the homeless referenced above to these services is frequently met with good result with regards to their daily bread – the things of this body and life: food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, etc. But like the other aforementioned groups, these are not just “the homeless” or “the immigrant”. They are souls, souls for whom our Lord Jesus Christ shed His Blood. The Pastor is uniquely suited, indeed Called and Ordained, to bring these needy what no other “organization” can – Christian hope and healing, leading to an eternal, heavenly home – a mansion prepared by God. I will leave the Pastoral care of these groups to another paper of this conference. I would like to deal with a particularly difficult category of “homeless”, one with which I have had significant experience in my time as a Pastor in Detroit: the homeless who seem to desire to remain so.

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

There are also the chronically homeless, sometimes generationally homeless, with which I have contact regularly. These are the homeless that I find sleeping between houses in a snow bank, burning furniture in abandoned homes to stay warm in January in Michigan, regularly engaged in prostitution and crime and drug sales and use, and while seeking physical protection and comfort, would seemingly prefer to remain homeless. I have worked with a good number of those so afflicted. These are they who, finding a place in a homeless shelter, leave it because they do not desire to live within the rules set by the shelter. These are they who are ineligible for shelters because they have sold their identification cards to get money for drugs. They do the same with “bridge cards”, state issued debit cards used for food and staples. These are they who after repeated arrests and imprisonments return to the very settings that the arrests are meant to take them out of, and return to homelessness, crime and hunger. These are they who after being “saved” from their situation by a family member or friend, and taken to a house in a nice suburb, escape such homes and return to abandoned houses and buildings and viaducts in the city because of the perceived freedoms and lack of structure and rules there. I will give brief descriptions of four such individuals, and my interactions with them, below.

It must be said that this condition, “chronic homelessness”, is a condition which is usually associated with other troubles – mental illness, drug addiction, physical or sexual abuse, or a combination of several of these. It is a life of “dirty drops” and “violations”, of “out time” and tethers, of “cellies” and “boosting” and “jonesing” and “dates” and “dumpster diving” and “dope sickness”.

A few anecdotal experiences: I was approached by a chronically homeless man with whom I’ve been working for over six years. He said that a local widow offered him \$50 to put Visqueen over her dilapidated windows to protect her from the cold. At his request, I drove him to a hardware store, purchased the visqueen and some duct tape, and gave him the supplies. I dropped him in front of what was supposed to be the house he was to work on, thinking that I had helped him, and hoping that working to earn money would become a trend in his life. About 30 minutes later the hardware store owner called me and said that he had returned all the materials, and received a cash refund. My guess is that he used the money to buy drugs.

A different man with whom I have worked asked to borrow the jack and tire iron from my car, because there was an elderly person with a flat tire who had offered him money to change the tire for him. I gave him the jack and tire iron. After several hours, when he hadn’t returned, I went looking for him. I found the jack and tire iron. He had used them to jack up a car a few blocks from the church and steal the tires and wheels, leaving the car hobbled upon my jack. I’m certain that a local drug dealer ended up with the money gained from the stolen tires.

In both cases, I dealt with the homeless person directly. In both cases in a matter of days the men had forgotten what they had done, or pretended to, and returned to ask me for help. Addicts are liars. They lie most profoundly to themselves. I did confront them with the facts. In both cases they ultimately admitted to what they had done. I have found that people in their

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

circumstance understand guilt. Those who have been arrested and convicted, some multiple times, have been forced to learn that there are consequences to bad behavior. For the Pastor, this makes the application of Law a bit easier. Like any fallen man, they rail against the accusations of the Law, and the Pastor may have to lead them to tie their bad behavior to specific Commandments, so that they can hear God's Command and then be led to see that they have broken it. They may yet have a sense of right and wrong, however calloused their conscience may be. This has given me the opportunity to speak to them about sin, and to help them understand that their bad behavior, besides breaking civil law, is sin, and breaks God's Law. And importantly such conviction, when it becomes contrition, opens the door for the Gospel, the teaching of God's grace. The Pastor then has the blessed opportunity to extend to them the forgiveness that Christ won for me, and for them, on the cross, and to teach regarding how that forgiveness comes.

A word about the setting in which I serve as Pastor: based on data commonly available on the internet: 47% of Detroiters are considered functionally illiterate. 34.5% live in poverty. The *per capita* income in Detroit in 2017 was \$17,667. 83% of Detroiters are African American, 74.3% of Detroit homes are "single parent homes". The median age of residents in the city is 34.6 years old. 81% of births in Wayne County, in which Detroit is located, are to unmarried women. Zion is located in what is known as "Southwest", the neighborhood on the west side of Detroit bordering on the city of Dearborn. The area has seen a recent "rebirth", and several large corporations (Quicken Loans, Ford Motor Company) have purchased large numbers of buildings and moved substantial operations and well-paid employees to the area. This has created a lot of new housing, and renovated housing, which isn't affordable any longer to the previous residents of the areas. Our church purchased several parcels and abandoned houses, and created a safe, well-lit campus with a new high school building. We lease our old Zion School building to a state charter school, and have over 1100 students on our campus on school days.

Now on to a few profiles and Pastoral comments regarding specific homeless folks that I have worked with in the last few years. I will use only a first initial to identify them, an initial that is not theirs. I present these based on my memory of the circumstances; I kept no documentation. Most of what I will present is publicly known to those who live on the streets in our area, and is probably in the public domain through arrest records. The names haven't been changed to protect the innocent, because in these cases no one is innocent. In that I include myself.

"A" is a young woman, not yet 20 years old. She is a prostitute. She is drug addicted. Her drug of choice was "meth". A troubled teen, she left a suburban home for the city to live in abandoned houses. I had helped her with food, and rides out of the city when she was threatened, so I had met her family. In my interactions with her I was able to pray with her, speak to her about the love of God in Christ, and help her with some immediate needs like clothing and bottled water and bags of peanuts, which we kept in the Rectory. I was contacted by her family, who wanted to come into the city and bring her home. They met me at the church.

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

We went to a local house known for drugs, and found “A” curled up in the bathroom, high on “meth”. Her skin was covered with lesions, and was greenish in color. She screamed and fought as we took her out of the house, but finally went with her family. I thought I had helped. Several weeks later, she returned to the streets around the church. A “live-in boyfriend” of her mother had allegedly assaulted her in the home to which she was taken for safety. On the streets, she quickly changed her drug of choice to heroin and returned to prostitution. I was able to speak with her, and help her a few more times before she was involved in the murder of one of her “dates”. I have not seen her since. I do know that I was able to relieve a little of her suffering. It is certainly my hope that the Word of God that I had the chance to speak to her worked according to God’s Promise: His Word does not return void, it accomplishes that for which He sends it (Isaiah 55:11). It is also my hope that she is in prison, and there unable to obtain drugs, and is in the spiritual care of a chaplain or visiting Pastor.

“P” is a woman in her twenties. She also was a troubled teen, who fled abuse in the home by a man living with her mother. She was a crack addict, and a prostitute. I worked with her for several years, and several times gave her rides out of the city when she was threatened, usually by pimps, sometimes by “johns”. I was able to help her with food on many occasions. Reluctant to give her money because of her addiction, I would drive her to the local McDonalds and buy the food for her. That gave me the opportunity to pray with her. When I help someone get food, I always pray with them before they eat. I typically use the Table Prayer from the Small Catechism. The words of that prayer are especially good (they are, after all, God’s Word) as a place to begin catechesis regarding God’s provision of our daily bread, and our opportunity to thank Him as the Good and Gracious Giver of all. That giving of thanks doesn’t stop when the meal is over. I had invited “P” to church many times, as I always do with those I help. Having come from a Roman Catholic background, she was not comfortable coming to church because she felt “too sinful”. This means that the Law has begun to do its work. And where the Law works, the Pastor knows when to apply Gospel.

Over time, although she remained drug addicted and continued in prostitution, she gave in to my repeated invitations and did come to church a few times. She sat in back, but followed the rite as printed. It is my hope that the Divine Service, which is the clearest confession of what we believe and teach, brought to her the Truth of Christ crucified and risen for her.

Later, she came to me when she was raped. She knew that I was “safe”, and trusted me. I was able to provide Pastoral care to her, giving her the comfort that only God’s Word can give, and praying with her for healing and safety. She was very appreciative. The police wouldn’t pursue the case because she is a prostitute. When our congregation became engaged in urban renewal, and razed several abandoned houses around the church, “P” relocated to abandoned homes by the interstate off-ramp. I have not seen her since. I was contacted by a local hospital, and when I responded and arrived at the hospital, they returned to me my wallet and fewer credit cards than

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

it had held when stolen, which hospital security had taken from “P” when she tried to use my identification to be admitted for a drug overdose.

“Q” was a construction manager, apparently well-paid, who became addicted to cocaine and lost his job and family, who will now have nothing to do with him. I have worked with him for the better part of 10 years. Between arrests for petty theft, car theft, and drug use, he regularly came to see me. We became friends. He frequently came to church, and would attend Bible class. Many of our members were generous to him, and gave him clothing, food, and money. Several times he left the city to avoid the stringencies of living in abandoned homes without heat in Michigan winters. When he decided to leave his life of homelessness and relocated to a suburban setting with bus fare our congregation provided, I was able to commend him to the care of a Pastor there. Within a few months he was back on the streets. I believe him to have been arrested again, he was up for his “third strike”, and I haven’t seen him for quite a while.

“S” grew up in the neighborhood around the church. His father was murdered when he was a boy. His brother was murdered when he was in high school. He himself was convicted of murder and given a life sentence, but released after 16 years because of prison overcrowding and good behavior on his part. I worked with “S” for just under a year, when he was arrested and convicted of murder again. He maintains his innocence. I have given support to his family (his mother struggles with multiple illness, and no one in the home is employed), and periodically correspond with him in prison. That is made more difficult by regular relocations to other facilities after fights with “cellies” or guards. We send weekly mailings of the church bulletin and my sermons to him. I have included several Bible studies in his mailings, which he completed and returned to show me that he had done them. Every once and a while he will write, and reports that he is in the care of a prison chaplain, and attending Protestant services in the prison.

“M” is a unique case, and one that offers the most hope. His homeless is compounded by the fact that he is completely deaf. He is regularly beaten up because he can’t hear someone coming up from behind him. After several years of helping him with money (he is not drug addicted), clothing, food and basic household items, he began attending church. We do not have a sign language interpreter for our services, so he sits in the pew during Mass and reads the weekly bulletin, the Ordo, and other tracts that are available in the Narthex. He visits me personally a couple of times a week. He alternates between being homeless and living in abandoned houses, and living in rented rooms in nearby low-rent tenements. He changes addresses so frequently that we receive his mail at the church, so that he gets his government checks. He is well received by the congregation, and receives help from several of the members.

These are only a few of the cases in which I have been involved. In all of the above cases, I am sure of one thing: they heard the Gospel, and the Word of God always works. When possible, I catechize. I always start with the Chief Article of the Christian faith, explaining every word. If I have the opportunity, I then teach the Six Chief Parts from our Small Catechism. I have found

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

that when I do, I frequently encounter cognitive dissonance, as what they have previously learned or held to be true of God is shown to be wrong. This provides the spiritual equivalent of the “teachable moment”, a time when the heart is open to the Word of God. I regularly give Bibles and Catechisms and devotional materials to the homeless with whom I have contact, so that they can continue in their learning even if I cannot provide it.

Our congregation exhibits the love of Christ in helping them where possible. Our members know and recognize a good number of the homeless with whom I’ve worked. They invite them to Church, welcome them when they arrive, invite them to stay for Bible class (where there is always coffee and snacks), and give them rides, clothing, food, and some financial help.

Word on the street is that at Zion we will help, and new homeless people regularly come to me, having been given my name. I lament that our congregation is small, and that we cannot do more. To Tertullian is attributed the quote “Fasting is the banquet of the soul.” I have learned that this is true. A necessary corollary then, is “Almsgiving is the treasure of the soul.” The Pastor, indeed any Christian, is moved to charity in the face of the suffering that the aforementioned people endure. That which we do for the least of these, His children, we have done to Him, although faith keeps no record, and seeks no reward.

The Pastor who regularly works with the homeless will just as regularly be asked for money. It is a blessing and a joy to help those in need, and the Pastor too learns this joy. By virtue of his vocation, however, the Pastor should be reimbursed from the Benevolence fund, so as not to create hardship for him in his vocation as father and husband. I suspect that if I gave money to everyone that asked, it would break the congregational budget, and might even rival the national debt. There is an overwhelming amount of need in Detroit. The compassion of the Pastor should not lead him into financial troubles himself. The congregation that Calls her Pastor to a setting where there is such great need should be prepared to support the Pastor as he faithfully discharges his vocation. That said, the Pastor too should know the blessing of eleemosynary giving. It is a joy that I have learned.

### **Conclusions:**

I have presented quite a few problems, made a few conclusions, and given no real solutions, at least in the temporal sense. Perhaps this paper will stimulate conversation that will lead to solutions. These are not new problems. Elijah ministered to the impoverished widow. (1 Kings 17:12) Our Lord has taught us that “...the poor you have with you always.” (Matthew 26:11) In the eternal sense, the only solution, the only answer, is the Gospel. All who work with the homeless must strive to speak Christ at every opportunity. The only true comfort is in Him. (Matthew 11:28) He is the only Bread that gives life. (John 6:33) There is salvation alone in the Son of Man (Acts 4:12), who had not where to lay His head. (Matthew 8:20) The believing who suffer homelessness here have mansions prepared for them in heaven. (John 14:2-3) The Christian faith is an incarnational faith. The Word became Flesh. He humbled Himself,

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A.✠ D.

enduring hunger and thirst and suffering. The work of the Pastor, as I see it, is to provide comfort and help and hope, to feed stomach and faith, to vest body and to be the hands and mouth through which Christ vests souls with His righteousness, until that day when we are relieved of the flesh and surround the throne of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. Then we will enjoy forever the Bosom of Abraham, with rich Lazarus in our true heavenly home.

Fr. Mark P. Braden  
Zion Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Detroit  
The Ninth Sunday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, 2019 A. ✠ D.