

National/International Report

Homelessness is 'in' as priority; thousands still out in the cold

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — Homelessness is in as a congressional agenda item these days, because so many Americans are out — out freezing in the gutters, out of shelter, out of hope.

Estimates of the numbers of homeless range vastly — from 600,000 to 6 million — with Los Angeles claiming some 31,000 alone, according to a 1984 federal study.

Mayors describe cities filled with more homeless: families, the unemployed, workers who can't afford housing, the mentally ill turned prematurely out of treatment centers (if they ever got treatment at all) — in short, more need for shelter everywhere.

Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young learned the extent of the problem firsthand when he spent 36 hours, in February cold, disguised as a homeless man. "I passed some of my good friends," Young reported later. "I asked one of them for a quarter for a cup of coffee. I knocked on his car window as he was leaving the church — and he didn't even want to look at me."

Churches plead that they cannot handle the influx of homeless people besieging church shelters, rectories and other possible refuges.

Now, the House and Senate both seem inclined to support stronger efforts to solve the national crisis posed by lack of shelter.

This interest, however, comes after years of federal budget cuts and even housing boondoggles perpetrated with the blessings of Congress.

Father J. Bryan Hehir, U.S. Catholic Conference secretary for social development and world peace, noted to a Senate subcommittee Jan. 29 that Congress in 1980 appropriated \$30.8 billion of President Jimmy Carter's \$33.5 billion fiscal 1981 budget request for housing programs. For fiscal 1987, it appropriated only \$7.8 billion, which was nonetheless an increase over the \$2.3 billion that President Reagan said would be enough. "That is a 75 percent reduction in housing aid," Father Hehir said.

Meanwhile, developers of a luxury-class apartment complex in Chicago got Congress to change the rules so a low-interest federal

mortgage would be obtainable and to waive a law requiring them to provide low-income units with the more lucrative apartments for the affluent. According to one report, the developers won at least \$67 million worth of local and national government favors.

All of that notwithstanding, this year Congress speedily passed and sent to Reagan legislation to transfer \$50 million of federal funds from one budget category to another to provide emergency shelter relief yet this winter.

"There is no doubt that this money is urgently needed, especially in light of the severe winter," Sen. Alan Dixon, D-Ill., said after the bill's passage. "At the same time, we need to put a structure into place which will bring some continuity to the programs which serve the homeless."

He introduced an Emergency Housing Act of 1987, to provide \$120 million for fiscal 1988 housing and shelter programs, including new efforts to provide transitional living arrangements for the homeless and efforts to

help them live on their own in the future. Under his bill, further federal funds would be available as well if states or local jurisdictions provide matching allocations.

The House was drafting its own proposals, too.

On Jan. 6, the first day of the new Congress, Rep. Mickey Leland, D-Texas, a Catholic, introduced the Homeless Persons Survival Act of 1987. Leland said it would provide a variety of services, including food assistance; physical and mental health care facilities; permanent housing programs for the poor; community residences for the mentally ill; shelter for parents with babies, for youths, and for homeless of all ages needing emergency housing; and education geared toward homeless children.

Various services of those types were recommended in testimony to a congressional subcommittee Feb. 4 by Father Edwin M. Conway, treasurer of Catholic Charities USA and administrator of Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The Catholic Church and other churches, of course, have been talking about the housing and homelessness crisis for a long time. Like Father Conway and Father Hehir, Auxiliary Bishop Eugene Marino of Washington, Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York and Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of New Orleans all have urged government attention to the plight of the homeless or poorly housed.

"The problem of homelessness is growing," Bishop Marino said in 1984. "The (economic) 'recovery' is not reaching the homeless. Our resources are being stretched to the breaking point."

"Because of the magnitude of the resources required, the funding of low-income housing must be primarily a federal responsibility," Cardinal O'Connor informed lawmakers in 1985.

"Termination or reduction of funds for housing ... will greatly aggravate a critical situation," Archbishop Hannan added in 1986.

Proposed ruling would deny homeless funds to churches

Washington (NC) — The U.S. Catholic Conference Feb. 20 urged the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to withdraw a proposed rule that would prevent use of federal funds for renovation of church-owned shelters for the homeless.

Under the proposed rule, devised by Housing and Urban Development to implement a 1986 law, federal "grant amounts may not be used to renovate, rehabilitate or convert buildings owned by primarily religious organizations."

However, in the law, the Homeless Housing Act of 1986, Congress "expressly included religious organizations in the class of eligible private, non-profit organizations" which could receive grants, according to Mark E. Chopko, USCC general counsel, and John A. Lieweg, associate general counsel.

In written comments, the two USCC attorneys said the term "primarily religious" is ambiguous and undefined. Furthermore,

they said, the rule's "reliance on 'ownership' rather than purpose and use is patently unreasonable."

Furthermore, they stated, "religious organizations are major providers of shelters for the homeless. Excluding them from participation in the program can only diminish its effectiveness in providing needed shelter for the homeless at a time when the numbers of persons in need of emergency shelter are increasing."

They said it is ironic that, under the rule, federal assistance "could not be used to renovate or convert an unused building, such as a closed school or storage building, even though the building was not being used for any religious purpose."

Chopko and Lieweg said that "the Supreme Court has affirmatively and repeatedly rejected absolute rules excluding religious organizations from participating in governmental programs." Supreme Court rulings in fact reveal "that secular activities

of religious organizations can receive governmental assistance in order to discharge important secular functions."

The emergency shelter program "does not advance religion," they said. They suggested that to maintain this balance the proposed rule could be revised to "specifically provide that grant funds cannot be used for religious purposes."

The new rule is the second such proposal in several months.

In a letter to regional housing program administrators, a Housing and Urban Development official in August 1986 spelled out a proposed guideline limiting the amount of Community Development Block Grant funds a shelter could receive if it were owned by a "pervasively sectarian" organization.

A Housing and Urban Development spokesman called those guidelines "nothing new" and said they represented "national standards" but were not the same as regulations.

Author says Jesuits betray Church, pope; order calls book a 'disgrace'

By Stephanie Overman

Washington (NC) — The Jesuits are failing the Catholic Church in a time of crisis, author Malachi Martin said last week during a Washington press conference that marked the release of his new book about the order.

Jesuit officials said that Martin's book, "The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church," is inaccurate, "phony" and "a disgrace."

Martin, a former Jesuit who has written other controversial books about the Church, said the Church "is in shambles" and religious orders such as the Jesuits "are crumbling."

"If (Pope) John Paul II could call on them (the Jesuits) in his crisis ... as he used to be able to do, he would be rowing downstream. As it is he's running uphill on eggs," Martin said.

Instead of fulfilling their role as "the pope's men," the Jesuits are "the spearhead of dissent" and "are fighting a war to the

death with the pope" to undo the universal authority of Rome and to dilute the democratic capitalism of the United States, Martin said.

He said he hoped his book would result in Jesuits returning to their special vow of obedience to the pope and in "people recognizing the values of the Jesuits but demanding more than politics and secularism" from them.

The Washington-based Jesuit Conference, which represents the 10 Jesuit provinces in the United States, issued a statement saying that the book, which was published by Simon and Schuster, "is marred by frequent factual errors and profoundly erroneous interpretations of the religious history of the past quarter century."

The conference statement included a paper by Jesuit Father John W. Padberg, of the Institute of Jesuit Sources in St. Louis, who said he found "at least 35 demonstrably wrong statements of fact, some of them repeated several times over."

Father Padberg, recycling a quote in the book that Martin attributes to Pope Pius XII, added, "Whoever could have thought up such a disgrace?"

The Jesuit Conference also released an

editorial scheduled for publication Feb. 21 in America magazine, published in New York by the Jesuits. The editorial said the book is full of wrong names and false dates and is "phony in more fundamental ways, describing meetings that the author never attended and attributing quotes to people that cannot be verified."

"It shows no sympathy for Vatican II or the recent experience of Catholics, yet pretends to be motivated by a protective love of the Church and its popes," the editorial stated.

Martin, whose other books include "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church," "The Final Conclave," and "Vatican," said he expected to be "harangued" by the Jesuits but that he wrote the book to "let the linen hang out."

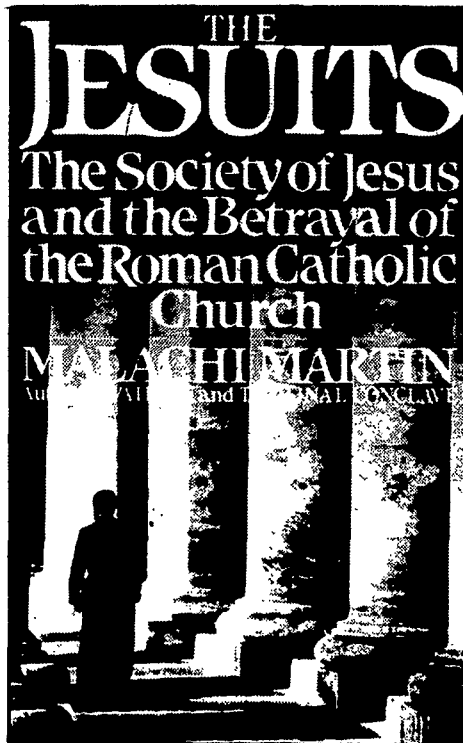
At the press conference Martin said he sees "modernity" as "our big trouble today."

In the United States "the question is how to be American, how to be democratic and live in a Church that is a monarchy."

But "we only have one pope, we Catholics. If we say he no longer speaks for Christ, that's the end. We can't attack him and destroy him. Without him there is no Catholic Church," Martin said. "The kingdom of God is never run by vote."



Malachi Martin



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