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McGrath, Russo: Churches, charities can't solve housing crisis alone



The Murphy Ranch housing complex in Morgan Hill was built for low-income renters with the help of a state bond measure in 2002, but the state has all but abandoned funding affordable housing. (PATRICK TEHAN/ THE MERCURY NEWS)

By **BISHOP PATRICK J. MCGRATH** and **KHANH DUY RUSSO**

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We are all feeling the effects of the urgent crisis of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in our beloved Valley of St. Clare.

Many experience the financial burden of paying higher rents, the time burden of enduring long commutes from relatively less expensive areas, or the space burden of sharing a small bungalow with several families. As we witness in the tent encampments beneath our freeways and along our creeks, thousands of our neighbors experience the burden of anxiety for daily survival, health and safety without a roof, a lock and a bed.

For those of us who are not homeless or personally burdened by high rents, this crisis points to a deeper moral and spiritual challenge for us to see those who are homeless and suffering as indeed our neighbors. The good news is that as a community, we do care about homelessness and the need for more affordable housing. The question remains: What does persistent homelessness and poverty in this land of abundance call us to do?

For years many faith communities, including the Catholic Church through Catholic Charities and Charities Housing, have actively helped house homeless and low-income families and individuals in cooperation with government agencies and other nonprofits through a broad network of charitable responses – providing emergency rental assistance, sheltering homeless women, men, and families through nonprofit shelters and interfaith shelter networks, and building affordable housing to assist thousands of people in moving out of poverty and homelessness into permanent supportive housing.

These works of human generosity and faith need to continue and grow.

Yet all our good work is being overwhelmed by the current housing crisis. Too many veterans have vouchers for affordable housing but no place willing to accept them. Too many children and families are living in cars or tripled up with other families in small homes because they can't afford the rent on their own. Too many people struggling with mental illness are languishing in our streets. Too many of our own teachers and workers who provide the foundation of our economic prosperity are commuting long distances to serve our community because they cannot afford ever increasing rents and housing prices.

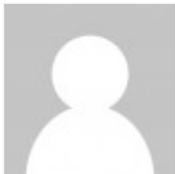
This November each of us who are registered voters will have the opportunity to vote our consciences. One measure affects both the most vulnerable homeless and each of us who are residents of Santa Clara County. That is Measure A, the proposal to finance building affordable housing to help end homelessness and to help children and families live in safe, decent affordable housing.

We need to do more to help our homeless neighbors, and we can't do it alone. That is why we are voting "Yes" on Measure A, to finance the building of permanent affordable housing to help end homelessness and enable children and families, seniors and people with disabilities and others of limited means to live in safe, decent, affordable housing.

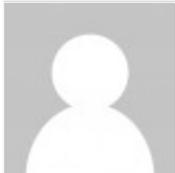
As Pope Francis said in his message to Congress during his visit last year, "Let me be clear. There is no moral or social justification, no justification whatsoever, for the lack of housing."

We invite you to help solve this crisis of homelessness by voting "Yes" on Measure A.

Bishop Patrick J. McGrath heads the Diocese of San Jose. Khanh Duy Russo is board president of Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County. They wrote this for The Mercury News.



Bishop Patrick J. McGrath



Khanh Duy Russo

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