

View From My Porch - as submitted to *Dayton's Bluff District Forum neighborhood newspaper* Spring of 2017 brought not only hay fever and colorful gardens to a Swede Hollow neighborhood, but also a growing crime wave. Garages have been broken into, bicycles and tools stolen, theft precautions meaningless. Adult males have found a perverse satisfaction in exposing their genitalia while urinating in front of children and women who live in the area. Litter in the grassy boulevards was once an occasional Burger King wrapper; now neighbors regularly pick up hypodermic needles, empty liquor bottles, and piles of human feces, as well as clothing, and odds and ends.

Residents who once felt safe walking their dogs in Swede Hollow Park have since learned to expect to be verbally or physically harassed by aggressive men who appear to be drunk, on drugs, and/or exhibiting psychotic behaviors. More recently, and striking more fear into the neighborhood, a man, not from the neighborhood, after being seen checking the Listening House doors, walked into a residence and removed items from an enclosed porch, piled them in the yard and added kindling to the pile. The owner, who had been called by a neighbor, returned home. A man held the intruder until police arrived. Apparently the intruder had been released from a hospital prior to his 'house visit' and the police returned him to the hospital.

Another resident, on returning home, was shocked to find an adult male asleep on her porch. Frightened, she left and stayed elsewhere, believing he had a knife...evidenced by the words he had carved into the porch railing: 'F--- this life'.

Saint Paul's City Planning Commission recently indicated that this is acceptable behavior. With chair Betsy Reveal voting, the hand vote was a 7/7 tie. Some who voted to overrule the neighborhood appeal and the City Zoning agreement with that appeal in effect reasoned that because people who have committed these crimes and misdemeanors are homeless, and since the First Lutheran Church sponsors a 'drop-in living room' (this is not a shelter and no meals are served), Listening House guests have every right to feel at home in the neighbors' yards and porches; this is my phrasing, not the pastors' or Listening House director's. As one Planning member said, "It's what churches do." I'm not sure what 'It' is, unless it is to give alcoholics and drug users a place to indulge inappropriate behaviors in public, litter the neighborhood with hypodermic needles, empty liquor bottles, and to encourage behaviors of exposing male genitalia, urination, and condoning thefts and break-ins.

I say 'encourage' and 'condone', because although the neighbors have pleaded with the church and 'living room' staff to provide actual service support, security detail, after hours grounds check, and better communication of expectations with the 'living room' guests, none of this appears to have been in the church's plans or follow through.

Sadly, if this property were a house on the same block, and the same number of excessive calls made to police; if the same number of urinators, thieves, drunks, drug users, psychotic, socially reprehensible people came out of a neighbor's house, said property would be labeled a problem property, the landlord notified, and eventually, the house would be decertified. I guess that's what makes a church blessing.

Does it matter that the Planning chair serves as board member of Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative according to Beacon's website? One would hope that serving on such a board expands knowledge in all directions. However, in the beginning, when the director of District 4 Community Council and the First Lutheran Church pastors saw no ethical or moral reason to notify the local neighborhood or hold an informational meeting before giving their blessing to the 'living room' for sheltered and non-sheltered homeless....when members of the church congregation publicly taunted neighbors as 'godless', 'lacking in compassion', and 'Nazis'; when members serving the residents of Saint Paul on zoning and planning or councils, accuse this neighborhood as NIMBY (not in my backyard)....I have to question: How dare you make such decisions and allegations when you Do Not Live in the same neighborhood? From Woodbury to the western suburbs...but not in the neighborhood, except for one couple who have openly

spoken.

Then I think, ahhhh....but since Listening House needed to move from their site near the old Dorothy Day shelter, and the police/problem calls when downtown were excessive, of course, you would not want it in your neighborhood. Moving one more 'problem' to the East Side, to Dayton's Bluff, is typical of our city government, this time by virtue of the city's own erroneous zoning decision, recently verified by the assistant city attorney (and which likely would have been noticed had the public been informed of the zoning approval in late 2016; but no, not even the District 4 director spoke up for those she represents...she lives in Woodbury!)

By the time this is in print, the second City Planning meeting and vote will have been held.

Then, it goes to the City Council. What I perceive so far is that people don't really listen, nor do they discern. And I want better from those who represent my community. Whether these people serve on the district council, the school board, the city council, planning, or zoning...here is what I want you to understand:

First, know yourself....you have to live with your decisions (try as you might to shut them out) and if you would not want to live with the constant threat of break-ins, harassment, sexual perversions, your child's safety, you have no right to shrug it off onto people you represent but may not live in your neighborhood. In this case, the issue up for vote was not for or against homelessness and who has a heart, but the fact that the City erred in the first place by allowing the Church and Listening House to open in the very beginning. The Assistant City Attorney found the zoning approval to be made in error and the standards not met. And shame on First Lutheran's pastors for signing a ten year lease with an organization that was undoubtedly going to be a questionable fit for such a neighborhood.

Sometimes you will have to vote against the person for whose approval you crave. You may be the only one who will make that vote....it feels exceedingly lonely. You have a spine! Show it!

To district council board members, this isn't about the apartment building across from your residence and how your neighbors behave; it's about a very small percentage of unsheltered homeless who are psychotic and/or socially disordered and who have no supportive services and so disrupt a vulnerable neighborhood. It is not about you reliving your poverty as a child. It is not about race, though there has been an attempt to tilt it that direction. It is not about how much you pay for your clothing or how you have used your bootstraps. Reframe your thinking, clean your lenses, and clear the noise from your head.

In such a case as Listening House being moved into a densely child-populated neighborhood, I see many people making a decision based on the large picture of "homelessness exists, let's show we have a heart." Early comments from some church congregants included demands that neighbors should 'fix' the needs of homeless. State and federal governments have not yet been able to 'fix' homelessness; churches and religions of many faiths and beliefs have attempted since before Christ to 'fix' homelessness. Why, now, would a small Dayton's Bluff neighborhood be expected to 'fix' homelessness?

It is up to each of us to work toward caring for our neighbor, whether s/he has a home or not. Some residents with stable lives will go to work in a drop-in living room, a church food bank, earn a wage or volunteer for several hours....and then go home to a quiet evening. Others will earn their wage at a job and go to a home they used to enjoy, only to pick up human feces, find a passed out body blocking their home entrance, explain to a little girl why the man was holding his penis in front of her....and then, instead of fixing supper, make a police report and spend the evening shaking and contemplate moving. If you don't want to be the latter, why would you force it on someone else? This isn't about homeless. It is about criminal and toxic behavior.

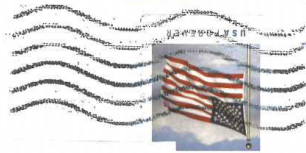
Sage Holben, 10/2017



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ROBERT & GERALDINE

"My name is MINER and I am a member of First Lutheran Church [and (if applicable) a resident of Saint Paul]. I am voicing my support for our tenant, Listening House. Listening House provides a valuable service to our community and supports the mission of First Lutheran. The conditions placed on Listening House and First Lutheran are unreasonable and infringe on our rights as a church to serve our mission by providing for those in need. Please vote in favor of Listening House, its guests, and First Lutheran Church on December 6th."

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