

ROOM IN THE INN- MEMPHIS

2020 EDITION

WELCOMING ALL AS AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH

BUILDING COMMUNITY ON LOVE AND
RESPECT

HOST SITE HANDBOOK

GIVING HOPE & HOSPITALITY IN A SAFE
ENVIRONMENT

#HOLYHOSPITALITY

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WHAT IS ROOM IN THE INN?

Mission

Sheltering those experiencing homelessness in a safe environment of hospitality

Vision

Holy Hospitality™

Core Values

Building community on love and respect

Welcoming all as an expression of faith

Giving hope and hospitality in a safe environment



History: Nashville Beginnings

Room In The Inn began in 1986 with a simple act of hospitality. Charles Strobel, then the priest of a congregation in East Nashville, invited people into his church building for the night when they had nowhere else to go. Struck by the realization that hundreds of congregations had warm, hospitable spaces, Strobel invited other houses of worship to open their doors to neighbors struggling with homelessness. The network has now grown to over 200 congregations in the Nashville Area with over 30 other individual Room In The Inn programs operating throughout the country. Find more at roomintheinn.org

History: RITI-Memphis

In November of 2009 a tiny congregation, Colonial Cumberland Presbyterian Church, answered God's call to welcome strangers into the warm, safe sanctuary of a building that was underused during the winter. Four guests shared dinner and fellowship that night with members of the church. This small group of people felt that this would be a good outreach "project." Room in the Inn is no longer an outreach project- it has become a way of life and ministry for more than 50 congregations, and that number continues to grow. Memphis has many, many more of those empty, warm houses of worship that could become sanctuaries of holy hospitality. Our hope is that by opening more and more of them we can prevent people from sleeping outside on the coldest nights of the year.

Following three years of winter shelter by the first host congregation an advisory committee was formed to discern future direction for what was becoming a thriving program for those experiencing homelessness. This small group recommended forming a permanent board of directors and applying for 501c3 status. In 2012 other congregations joined as host sites which allowed for more guests to receive winter shelter. There has been consistent growth of the congregational network with over 50 participating currently representing 15 denominations, 2 faith traditions, other non-profits, and educational institutions.

The growth in the number of congregations and the number of guests created a need for a permanent place for registering, orienting and organizing the guests for pick up. The Carpenter's House (building offered by First UMC) became the central location for Room in the Inn-Memphis services to guests in 2014 and continues to be the hub of the ministry. A Day Center began January, 2019. This offers guests the opportunity to be inside during the extreme cold and heat and access to restroom facilities three days each week. Programming continues to develop. Currently activities include NA/AA groups, Spirituality Group, Yoga, Art, Foot Clinic, movies and performances by local musicians. As the network of congregations grows, the dreams of making a greater impact also grows.

THE ROOM IN THE INN EXPERIENCE

Charles Strobel, Room in the Inn Founding Director

Room In The Inn is a simple concept addressing a complex problem. It starts with building relationships of trust and respect in an atmosphere of non-violence. It believes in the power of love offered in one-to-one encounters with one another.

WHAT RITI IS NOT

- Room In The Inn is not an attempt to resolve all of the issues of the homeless. The problems are too deep and too personal.
- Room In The Inn is not a program through which a congregation takes one or more homeless people “underwing,” providing them with economic assistance, job training, and personal spiritual direction. These gifts can be offered in time, as relationships develop.
- Room In The Inn is not about establishing another large shelter downtown where hundreds of people are cared for nightly.
- And it is not about boards of directors and major fundraising campaigns for capital projects.

WHAT IS IT?

- Room In The Inn is a way for more people in every sector to understand the problems of the homeless by becoming directly involved with people who are homeless.
- Room In The Inn is a means through which congregations of every faith open their facilities to welcome twelve to fifteen homeless people as guests for the night.
- Room In The Inn is about changing people, guests and hosts alike. It creates an environment with the opportunity for the guests to learn that there are people who care...and for the hosts to come to understand that the faceless figure on the street corner is more than a statistic...and that there are solutions.
- Room In The Inn is about serving without prejudice or pride. It is about accepting everyone.
- Room In The Inn is about people of religion putting the tenets of their faith into practice.
- Room In The Inn is not about giving; it is about receiving. It is about everyone, both guests and hosts, receiving a blessing—an encounter with God in the midst of suffering, hardship, pain and grief.
- Room In The Inn is an opportunity, not an answer. It is an experience, not a solution.
- In short, Room In The Inn is an opportunity to experience the presence of God in a different way.

Finally, Room In The Inn gets its name from a story in the Bible about a family coming to a small town called Bethlehem and not finding any room in the inn. We cannot go back in history 2000 years and change that story. But what we can do each evening we are open is to change that story's ending by providing room in the inn.



THE ROLE OF THE COORDINATOR

Each congregation that takes part in RITI-Memphis will have a coordinator. This person will assume the responsibility of overseeing the shelter program for the faith community.

There are five basic responsibilities for a coordinator.

Organization and Coordination

The coordinator will work with other volunteers to create a detailed plan for carrying out Room In The Inn. This will include identifying shelter space, obtaining cots/mattresses, soliciting donations for supplies, identifying volunteer tasks, and managing any budget.



Recruiting and Supporting Volunteers

There are many strategies for finding volunteers: announcements at services, notices in the bulletin/congregational emails, recruiting small groups and classes, posting on social media, participating in a missions fair, or hosting a Room In The Inn kick-off event.

To equip host site volunteers for providing shelter, staff members from RITI-Memphis are available to assist in training sessions. Please email innkeeper@ritimemphis.org to learn more.

Coordinators will want to teach volunteers the details of shelter at their individual congregations.

Scheduling

The coordinator is usually responsible for scheduling volunteers for each night of shelter. This would involve making sure all responsibilities are covered: set up, transportation, meals, overnight innkeepers, and clean up.

Serving as Liaison

Part of the coordinator's role is to communicate on a regular basis with congregational leadership, the volunteers, and RITI-Memphis Staff. Any schedule changes should be reported to RITI Staff ASAP to innkeeper@ritimemphis.org or 901-395-3329.

Ensure the [Nightly Summary Report](#) from the previous night is completed the morning you return guests and submitted to RITI Staff. This form is critical in evaluating the ongoing program, in identifying problems and concerns, and for capturing data about RITI. It is necessary staff receive this information before 4pm the day following your night of hosting guests (i.e. Tuesday night hosts submit forms before 4pm Wednesday).

This form and other helpful information is available at ritimemphis.org/host.

Handling Issues and Emergencies

There may be times when a coordinator has to figure out how to cover for volunteers who don't show up, resolve conflicts, and handle emergencies with the guests.

ORGANIZING THE PROGRAM



Step One: Enlist Planning Volunteers and Coordinators

One person can recruit volunteers, but a team works best. This team is responsible for establishing guidelines for the guests to follow while at your congregation, scheduling volunteers, addressing problems, and serving as congregational liaison to RITI Staff.

Step Two: Recruit Volunteers

This can begin as early as August with a "Thank You" note to last year's volunteers and/or a message from the pulpit. Team leaders and coordinators can promote RITI-Memphis to classes and small groups. Some congregations have "kick-off" events like a dinner to recruit volunteers. Word-of-mouth is also very effective. RITI Staff are available to attend recruitment events by appointment.

Step Three: Talk with Groups, Classes, and Departments

Sometimes getting groups involved in RITI is easier than recruiting individuals. There is a comfort in working with people you know. Some congregations assign an evening to a specific group and ask that group to plan the logistics.

Step Four: Follow-up

Volunteers should place their names on sign-up sheets well in advance of the scheduled night for RITI. The coordinator or team leaders should remind the volunteers of their commitment the Sunday before their scheduled night. It's also a good idea to thank volunteers for their efforts. One congregation uses its weekly bulletin to express its thanks.

Your volunteers can receive the regular RITI Newsletter by subscribing on our website: ritimemphis.org.

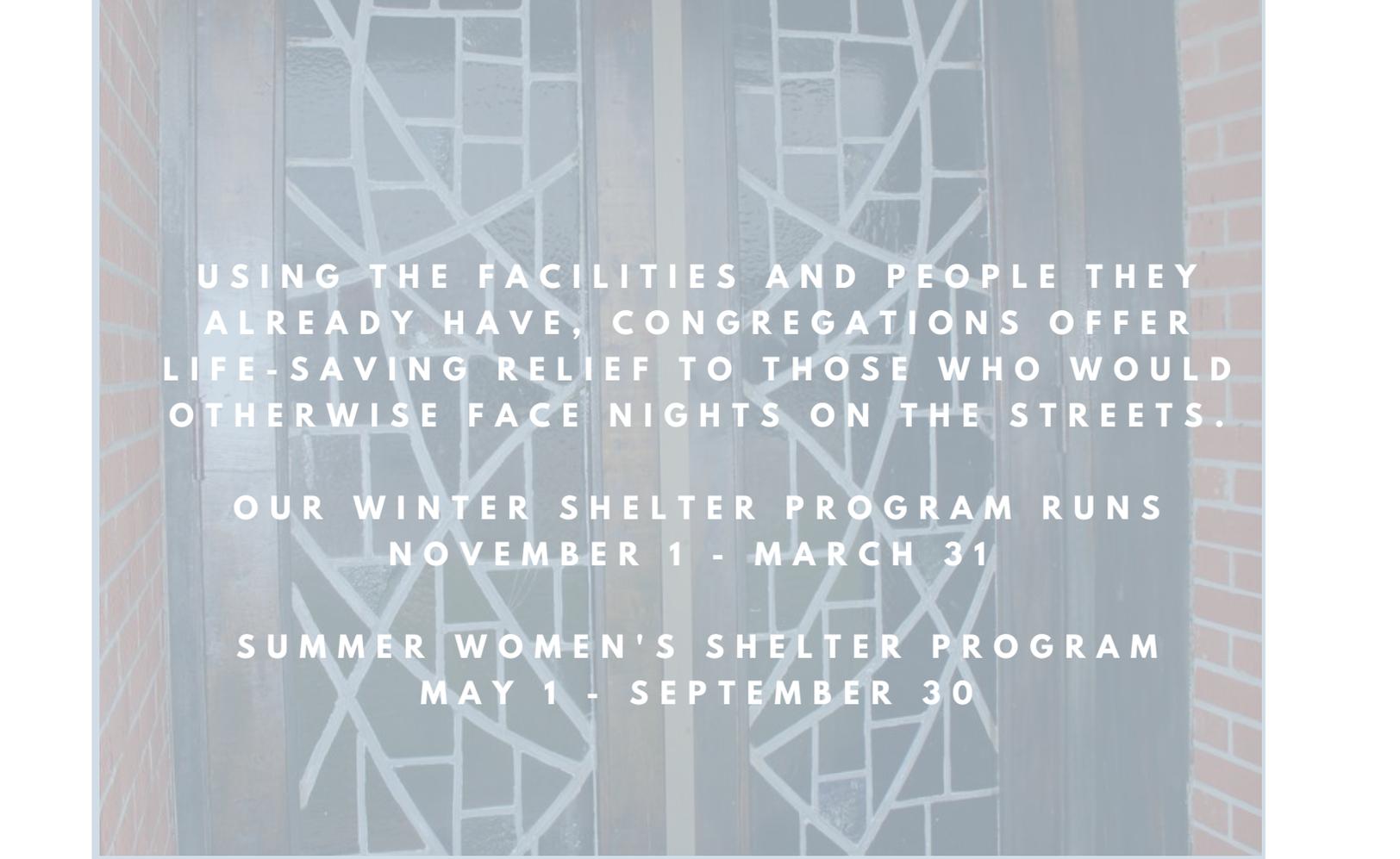
If you have questions, need help solving a problem, or would like a sounding board, please contact RITI Staff.

RITI OFFICE:

Innkeeper@ritimemphis.org

901-395-3329

**212 North Second Street
Memphis, TN 38105**



USING THE FACILITIES AND PEOPLE THEY
ALREADY HAVE, CONGREGATIONS OFFER
LIFE-SAVING RELIEF TO THOSE WHO WOULD
OTHERWISE FACE NIGHTS ON THE STREETS.

OUR WINTER SHELTER PROGRAM RUNS
NOVEMBER 1 - MARCH 31

SUMMER WOMEN'S SHELTER PROGRAM
MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 30

HOW DO WE GET STARTED

Facilities : Classroom space or community room, activity center

- Sufficient mattresses, pillows, cots, and blankets
- Table and chairs for sharing meals
- A place to prepare and serve food
- Enough food and drink for dinner and breakfast
- Adequate bathroom facilities
- Toiletry items like towels, soap, wash cloths, etc.
- Sufficient heating and cooling
- Approved safety exits with clear access
- Designated smoking area or noted non-smoking campus.
- Basics like a first aid kit, fire extinguisher, and phone service

People: Staff and volunteers willing to give their time and energy a few nights during the winter season

- Transport guests from the RITI Campus and back in the morning
- Set up for Room In The Inn
- Prepare and serve the evening and morning meals
- Spend the night
- Clean up after Room In The Inn
- Schedule volunteers and provide oversight of the program
- Launder any linens and towels used

WHAT A TYPICAL NIGHT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

Sample Schedule

4:30 p.m. Volunteers begin set-up

5:15 p.m. Pick up guests at the RITI Campus, 212 N. Second Street

6:00 p.m. Arrive at congregation

6:00-6:30 p.m. Welcome guests, allow them to get settled, explain guidelines specific to your site as well as locations of bathrooms and smoking areas, lights out time, etc.

6:30-7 p.m. Dinner and conversation

7:00-10 p.m. Movie, television, or game time for those wanting to stay up. Open shower, laundry, and clothes closet, if available.

10:00p.m. Lights out

5:00 a.m. Wake up

5-5:30 a.m. Morning routine and clean-up sleeping area

5:30-6 a.m. Breakfast

6:00 a.m. Leave for RITI Campus, Volunteers complete clean-up

Coordinators fill out and submit Nightly Summary Report to RITI-Memphis

*Report must be recieved before 4pm



HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS WILL WE NEED?

Your congregation will need volunteers to operate your program. Some of the responsibilities include:

- Transporting guests from RITI Campus
- Setting up for Room in the Inn at your location
- Preparing the evening meal
- Serving the evening meal
- Visiting with guests
- Facilitating the shower process and/or clothes closet, depending on what your location offers. (One or two changes of clothes should be sufficient for any guest)
- Spending the night (2 volunteers)
- Preparing the morning meal
- Serving the morning meal
- Transporting guests to RITI Campus in the morning
- Cleaning up after Room in the Inn
- Scheduling volunteers and providing oversight of the program
- Laundry (linens, etc.)



TIPS FOR RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

ASK:

- Ask face-to-face
- Follow-Up on interest
- Offer options for all ages
- People you wouldn't normally ask & new members
- Plan an event/meal/info session

BE CLEAR:

- Detailed responsibilities
- Time commitment
- Ask for specific duties, rather than general help

SHARE YOUR PASSION:

- Why is this a meaningful way to spend your time?
- How does this make a difference?
- Gather and share stories from other volunteers.

CONGREGATION INVOLVEMENT:

- Ask classes & small groups to share a night
- Ask clergy to promote during service, in the bulletin or newsletter, and on the website

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES FOR VOLUNTEERS

The heart of Room in the Inn - Memphis is the local volunteers who open their doors and welcome in strangers as honored guests week after week. The volunteers give Room in the Inn - Memphis its power and meaning. No matter how many congregations participate and how large the program grows, the intimate experience of eating together and sharing stories is the critical element. Each volunteer has a unique opportunity to offer the gift of hospitality.

This does not mean that we want to put ourselves at risk or tempt our guests to do the wrong things, because many are facing desperate circumstances.

The following guidelines can help you be the best possible host for our guests:

- **Dress appropriately**
- **Be respectful** to all guests and volunteers and consider each guest as an individual.
- **Do not share personal information** such as your telephone number, address, or email. If a guest asks you where you live, do not give your address. You can say something more general like, "I live in this neighborhood," or "I live in East Memphis." If anyone presses you for a specific address, just say, "We are not allowed to give out that information." The same goes for your phone number and being friends with guests on social media.
- **Do not give guests rides** in your personal vehicle apart from regular RITI transportation.
- **Keep your cell phone to yourself.** Almost all of us carry a cell phone these days, but try to keep cell phone usage to a minimum on Room in the Inn nights. We all have people who need to stay in touch with us for emergencies. If you receive an urgent call, take your phone to another room to respond. This allows us to stay focused on the needs of our guests.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Do not share information about your guests with other people.
- **Always use a calm voice and do not touch a guest without permission** under any circumstance.
- **Refrain from accepting gifts** and giving gifts to individual guests, and treat guests equally. Do not give money to one guest, unless you plan to give it to every guest. It might be best to just say, "We are not allowed to give money to our guests." If you wish to do something extra for an individual guest, please speak with a RITI coordinator or contact the RITI Office.
- **Consider each guest as an individual.** Be a good listener for our guests, but do not expect to "fix" a guest's situation.
- **Be honest** and do not make promises that can't be kept. Feel free to say "I don't know" or "I can't."
- **Accept responsibility for your actions.**
- **Use your instincts.** If a guest or another volunteer says or does something that makes you feel uncomfortable, please tell the RITI coordinator or an assistant coordinator as soon as possible. They can keep an eye on that person for the rest of the night to see if he or she is following the accepted guidelines. If someone says or does something that is totally inappropriate, they will ask that person to leave. If that person is a guest, they will return him or her to the RITI Campus.

A LOOK AT OUR GUESTS & HOMELESSNESS

The people served by Room In The Inn come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Many are natives of Memphis, while some come from other places. A large number of participants have college degrees, and others have had little formal education. They are sons, daughters, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Some have had successful careers in business, the arts, or the military.

Each person has a name, a story, and dreams for the future.

While a small part of our population is experiencing homelessness because of economic issues, most are facing a much more complex set of issues. People who are chronically homeless invariably suffer from a combination of several of the following disabling conditions:

Mental Illness

Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other severe and persistent mental illness

Physical Disabilities

Profound injuries, illness, birth defects, or socially debilitating physical traits (such as disfigurement, dental deficiencies, or obesity caused by 'survival' mentality)

Educational Deficiencies

Inability to read/write, the lack of basic academic skills or no high school diploma

Severe Trauma

History of sexual or physical abuse, combat, catastrophic loss of family or a similar traumatic event

Addiction

Drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and other addictions

Severe Family Dysfunction

Abusive parents, broken homes, and/or multiple residences/caregivers

No Family or Significant Support System

Total lack of family or support systems due to death, alienation, or institutional childhood

Learning Disabilities

Dyslexia, ADHD and other disorders that interfere with education and life functioning

Developmental Disabilities

Low IQ or brain damage that hinders intellectual functioning

Criminal History

Existence of a criminal record that seriously limits opportunity

Limited Occupational Skill Set

Inability to do anything beyond the most basic manual labor

Transportation Deficiencies

Inability to purchase, maintain, insure or legally drive a car or obtain transportation through public or private means.

Life Skill Deficiencies

Inability to manage the most basic life function such as hygiene, housing, transportation, and interpersonal relationships

Prior Long-Term Institutionalization

Extended stays in foster care, juvenile institutions, mental hospitals, or other institutions

Generational Poverty

Two or more generations of family dependent on public assistance or charity for basic living needs

System Navigation

Inability to effectively navigate Government and Social Service Agencies

OUR GUESTS - EXPECTATIONS

The bottom line is that somehow along the way, whether they made decisions that contributed or not, life has been harsh. Homelessness is where our guests have found themselves for the moment.

As a measure of reassurance, please know that the guests you will encounter at RITI-Memphis have been pre-screened and registered prior to their arrival. They are known to others in the community who are experiencing homelessness and to those who provide services for the homeless.

All guests at RITI must attend an orientation session before staying at a host location. This orientation explains how the shelter program works and about the principles of nonviolence and respect. If guests do not follow these guidelines, they will be asked to leave the program for a period of time. The orientation video is available on our website at roomintheinn-memphis.org.

If a guest becomes inappropriate for the program during their stay at the host site, the coordinator may ask them to leave and offer to call a taxi for transportation back downtown. If assistance is needed in asking a guest to leave, please use the RITI emergency number to have a staff member assist you. If the situation is handled without staff be sure to include it in your Nightly Summary Report (submitted by 4pm the next day - i.e. Tuesday night hosts submit forms by 4pm Wednesday).

How will they act?

Generally, our guests are well-mannered, thankful, and grateful to have a warm, safe place for the night. They may be very tired. It is against the law to be homeless (no loitering), so they are constantly on the move and therefore exhausted.

Some have a keen sense of humor. Some are college educated and well read. Some seem completely normal and you will wonder why they are not stable members of society. On the other hand, some may mumble (or even yell) to themselves or choose to be alone for the evening. Some may seem agitated. Remember, they have had a hard day - or week - or life! They may have been abused, stolen from, assaulted, or otherwise victimized. So they have trust issues. As long as they are not disturbing the volunteers or other guests, they are fine to stay the night.

What if I feel uncomfortable or unsafe?

What if someone is not following the rules? Tell a RITI coordinator or assistant coordinator right away. They are trained in how to handle a myriad of situations. If you are just generally uncomfortable, find another task besides interacting with the guests—clean the kitchen, help organize the clothes closet, etc. Even if you are uneasy making a new friend, you can still be a valuable volunteer.

Working with people experiencing homelessness might not be your thing. That's OK. Thank you for giving it a try! But please, if you feel compelled to comment on any of our guests' behavior or personalities, do so away from Room in the Inn. They are most definitely our guests, and we would never want to make them feel unwelcome or judged. They get that enough on the streets. Room in the Inn is their safe place.

What will we talk about?

Any number of subjects! Talk to them like you would any other new acquaintance. Ask them what they did during the day, or what their favorite food is, or about the most recent sporting event. Ask them how they are doing. Then, really listen. Look them in the eye and offer a friendly ear. Most of the time, the people they encounter pretend they are not there. Treat them like a fellow human being. You will have a lot more in common than you think.

EXPECTATIONS, CONT.

What are the rules?

- No disrespectful language.
- No violence in any form.
- No possession of drugs or alcohol.
- Men and women sleep separately.
- Treat others and property with respect.

These rules are for guests and volunteers alike.



HELPING INDIVIDUAL GUESTS

Room in the Inn - Memphis guests often share their personal stories with volunteers at each congregation, and their experiences can inspire generosity and kindle a desire to become more deeply involved with a particular individual. This might include offering special assistance with employment, housing, medical needs, or some other request.

Before providing help to a guest, volunteers should consider consulting with a member of the Room in the Inn - Memphis team. Staff members may not know about the difficulties a guest is experiencing and can provide additional support and guidance. They can serve as liaisons between the congregation and guest in order to protect confidentiality and fairness. Finally, Room in the Inn - Memphis staff members might be able to present a more complete picture of someone's specific needs.

Reaching out is an act of faith. Room in the Inn - Memphis provides a venue for fellowship that can result in empowerment and change. Its staff serves as a sounding board in determining appropriate assistance for individual guests so that a congregation's resources can be used in the most effective way.

TRANSPORTATION INSTRUCTIONS



BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

- Each congregation provides information at the beginning of every season including which nights they will host and how many guests they are able to host.
- Staff are registering and arranging lists of guests for multiple congregations each night based on this pre-determined information.
- If the transportation arriving will change the number of guests you are able to host, staff must have that information before 4pm. (Call or text 901-395-3329)
 - For example, if the van holds 14 passengers, but the driver brings a friend, the church can now only host 13 guests unless additional transportation is provided.

GUEST PICK-UP

- Guests can be picked up at First United Methodist Church, 204 N 2nd Street.
- If space is available, please pull up to the sanctuary doors (corner of Poplar & 2nd, facing 2nd Street). Other space is available in the parking lot at the corner of 2nd and Exchange Ave.
- Transportation should arrive 5-5:15pm.
 - If the transportation will be late, please call 901-395-3329. If there is no answer, please leave a message with the estimated time of arrival.
- Alert staff that you have arrived.
 - Drivers are welcome to socialize with guests until they are ready to depart, or you may wait in the vehicle after alerting staff of your arrival and location.
- Staff will assemble the guests for your congregation and help load your vehicle(s) safely.

IN TRANSIT

- RITI rules/expectations begin before guests enter your vehicle and remain in effect until they have left the RITI campus the following morning.
- Please notify the site coordinator or RITI staff of any issues before the following day so they may be addressed with the guest in a timely manner.

GUEST DROP-OFF

- Using the list of guests provided the previous evening, please ensure all guests are present before departing the host facilities.
- All guests must be returned to the RITI campus.
- Please have guests returned by 7am

A COMMUNION MEAL



Since our beginnings, I've used many images to explain the importance of Room in the Inn. I've described the program as a "sanctuary" from the violence of the streets, "Ellis Island" for urban refugees, a "Red Cross tent" in a war zone, an "oasis" in an asphalt desert, a gathering of "friends," and as a rewriting of the original "No Room in the Inn" story. The most important image I use now is the notion of a "communion meal."

Consider all the ways we eat a meal—often on the run. Twelve people sitting individually at a McDonald's eat a meal. But something is missing.

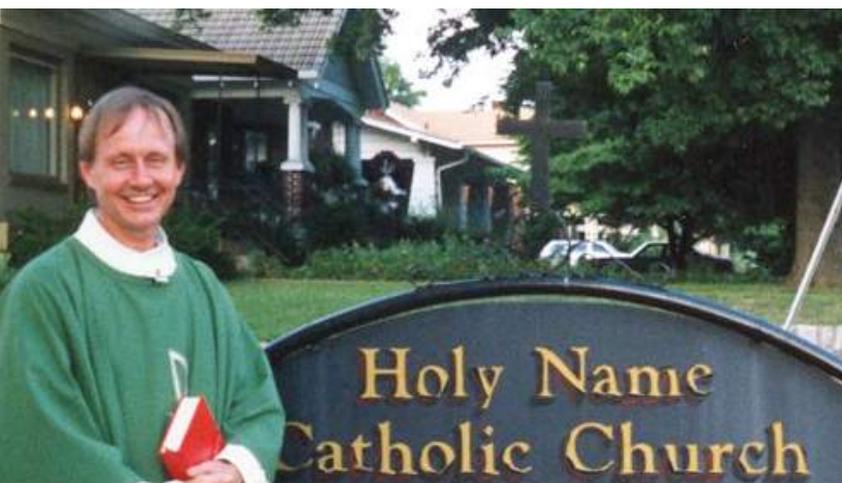
The gathering of twelve people in a Room in the Inn congregation also experience a meal, to be sure, but more. It's not just a meal, but a communion meal. A communion meal is a meal that has sharing and intimacy. It reaches the depths of the soul and the heights of mystery. It is called sacred by people of religion. Unlike God, however, no one ever doubts or needs to prove its existence. A communion meal is experienced the way we experience the sunsets and the mountain tops.

For years homeless and housed individuals have gathered to sit down and share such a meal. It has been a powerful element of grace and hospitality that has transformed thousands of lives. Regardless of the food—chili, lasagna, turkey, hamburger, potatoes, corn, salad, rolls and drink—a Room in the Inn supper carries the force of the unleavened bread, unblemished lamb and choicest wine eaten at those ancient Passover suppers and at the Last Supper.

Ultimately, such a meal contains the possibility of a communion with the God among us.

Over the years people have come together to do this. Reluctantly at first, for suspicions were plenty. Some congregation members stood on the other side of a serving counter, like vending machines dispensing food without sharing, while homeless guests wanted to go off and eat in a corner by themselves.

But the invitation of God to come, sit down and eat together won the hearts of all. And the miracle of a communion meal was born. Now all these years later, I believe it remains our most important connection. Room in the Inn - Memphis may be safe and warm, clean and quiet, dependable and secure. But most importantly, it is loving hospitality—found in the sharing, the laughter, the tears, the memories, the hopes and all those other moments that bring us communion with others and with God.



-Charles Strobel
Founder, Room In The Inn

BUILDING COMMUNITY ON

Love & Respect

WELCOMING ALL AS AN

Expression of Faith

GIVING

Hope & Hospitality

IN A

Safe Environment

