



Old Catholic Churches International

August 14, 2025
Feast of Saint Maximilian Kolbe

STATEMENT ON THE EROSION OF HUMAN DIGNITY: HOMELESSNESS, CRIMINALIZATION, AND MILITARIZATION

Summary:

The Universal Catholic Church has always maintained a deep concern for the poor and homeless. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus challenges all of us to be attentive to those who need our help, whether they have been wounded by violence, misfortune, or poverty. The recent decisions by this Administration to make homelessness an 'evil' to be subjugated to the removal of their basic dignity and human rights is something we find abhorrent.

Every day, as with the Samaritan, we find our streets littered with the wounded and those in need of our help. Simply to 'clean' the streets of them as discarded junk is immoral and doesn't solve the underlying issues of a compassionate and lasting solution. Many of the homeless are suffering from illness, mental disease, and lifelong addiction. These are not someone to be scorned but supported to recovery. What does it say of a nation's leader who wishes to 'clean the streets' to rid seeing them when that is precisely what we are to do: see them, help them, and solve a crisis, not strip and imprison them.

Old Catholic Churches International Statement on Homelessness

As Old Catholic Churches International, rooted in the foundational Christian call to love our neighbor and uphold the inherent dignity of every human being, we observe with profound dismay recent trends within the United States that erode the very fabric of a compassionate society. Our faith compels us to speak out against actions that marginalize the vulnerable, particularly those experiencing homelessness. The principles of the Gospel, which call us to a preferential option for the poor and to minister to 'the least of these' (Matthew 25:40), stand in direct opposition to policies that

No. 2025081401

punish poverty rather than alleviate it.

The Deplorable Removal of Homeless Individuals in Washington, D.C.

We are deeply troubled by recent reports detailing the forcible removal of homeless encampments and individuals from public spaces within Washington, D.C. Such actions, often undertaken without adequate provision for alternative housing or comprehensive support services, do not solve the complex issue of homelessness but merely displace suffering and further traumatize individuals already living on the margins. This approach contradicts the fundamental principles of human solidarity and violates the basic human right to shelter and safety. A city's greatness should be measured not by the absence of visible poverty, but by its commitment to care for its most vulnerable citizens and ensure that all residents can live with dignity.

These removals often lead to a deeper cycle of despair, as individuals lose their meager belongings, vital documents, and connections to essential services. Instead of offering tangible solutions, these actions push people further into the shadows, making it even harder for them to access the help they need. We urge the authorities in Washington D.C., and indeed in all municipalities, to prioritize compassionate, person-centered solutions that address the root causes of homelessness, rather than resorting to punitive measures that only exacerbate the problem.

The Unjustifiable Criminalization of Homelessness

Even more disturbing than specific displacement actions is the growing national trend towards criminalizing homelessness. Across the United States, laws are being enacted and enforced that prohibit basic life-sustaining activities in public spaces, such as sleeping, eating, sitting, or even existing without a permanent address. Laws that make it illegal to panhandle, or to set up temporary shelters, effectively punish individuals for their lack of housing. This punitive approach cycles individuals through the justice system, creating indelible records that serve as significant barriers to future employment, stable housing, and access to social services. It perpetuates the very condition it purports to address, trapping individuals in a spiral of poverty and incarceration.

Criminalizing homelessness is a profound moral failing. It transforms a complex social and economic problem into a correctional one, imposing fines and jail time on those who are already struggling to survive. This approach diverts valuable public resources from proven solutions, such as 'Housing First' initiatives, towards enforcement and incarceration. As Old Catholics, we firmly believe that poverty is not a crime, and our societies have a moral imperative to support, not penalize, those in need.

No. 2025081401

The Disturbing Use of the National Guard in U.S. Cities

The increasing reliance on the National Guard and other militarized forces to manage domestic social issues, particularly those involving public order or the displacement of vulnerable populations, raises grave concerns. While the National Guard serves a vital role in emergencies, its deployment in contexts that involve addressing social challenges like homelessness or civil unrest risks militarizing situations that require social solutions, compassion, and de-escalation. Such deployments can alienate communities, escalate tensions, and further erode trust between citizens and authorities.

The sight of armed personnel deployed in urban areas to address issues that are fundamentally social and economic signifies a failure to address the root causes of societal distress through appropriate and humane means. Resources spent on such deployments would be far better invested in community-based programs, mental health services, affordable housing initiatives, and job training programs that offer genuine pathways out of poverty and crisis. Militarization should never be the primary response to social challenges that demand empathy and comprehensive support.

A Call to Uphold Human Dignity and Compassion

Our Old Catholic tradition emphasizes social justice, upholding the dignity of all persons, and a preferential option for the poor. We believe that true security and prosperity for a nation are found not in punitive measures or the erasure of visible poverty, but in comprehensive social policies that guarantee basic human rights. These rights include access to safe, affordable housing, comprehensive healthcare, robust mental health services, and pathways to sustainable employment and education. Policies such as 'Housing First,' which prioritize immediate housing and then offer voluntary support services, have proven to be more effective, humane, and cost-efficient than criminalization.

We call upon public officials at all levels—local, state, and federal—to adopt policies rooted in compassion, evidence-based practices, and a genuine commitment to ending homelessness through investment in social infrastructure rather than criminalization. We urge lawmakers to repeal anti-homeless ordinances, redirect funds from enforcement to support services, and foster collaborative efforts between government, non-profits, faith communities, and directly impacted individuals to craft solutions that truly work.

Conclusion:

Old Catholic Churches International stands in unwavering solidarity with those experiencing homelessness and all who work tirelessly to advocate for their rights. We urge governments and communities to remember their fundamental responsibility to care for every member of society, especially the most vulnerable. Let us transform our approach from one of punishment and displacement to one of embrace, support, and restoration, reflecting the true spirit of human fraternity and divine love. It is only through

118 Frances Drive - North Augusta, South Carolina 29841 - (762) 215-5312
info@myocci.org - <https://www.myocci.org>

No. 2025081401

compassion, justice, and a commitment to human dignity that we can build truly just and flourishing societies.

Sincerely in Christ,

 *Gregory W. Godsey*

Rt. Rev. Gregory W. Godsey, OSFoc



Presiding Bishop, Old Catholic Churches International

And the Bishops of the Old Catholic Churches International

No. 2025081401

Sources:

- National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. *Housing Not Handcuffs: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*. (Various editions and reports, e.g., 2019, 2021).
- National Alliance to End Homelessness. *State of Homelessness: 2023 Edition*. (Annual reports and data briefs).
- Coalition for the Homeless (Washington D.C.). *Homelessness in D.C. and Advocacy Reports*. (Specific reports on encampment clearings and local statistics).
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). *Housing First: A Guide to Implementing Housing First Programs*. (Guidance and research on effective interventions).
- The Interagency Council on Homelessness. *Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. (Federal policy documents and goals).
- Various media outlets reporting on specific incidents of homeless encampment clearings in Washington D.C. and discussions on the use of National Guard in U.S. cities for public order issues (e.g., The Washington Post, The New York Times, Associated Press archives, for relevant periods).