

REMARKS BY NORFOLK MAYOR PAUL D. FRAIM
THE FAITH PARTNERSHIP LUNCHEON
Freemason Street Baptist Church
July 22, 2008

Good afternoon and thank you for coming.

In addition to the 69 congregations represented, we are also joined by my colleagues on City Council, Vice Mayor Burfoot and Councilmembers Hester, Whibley, Williams and Winn.

Three years ago, I announced the city's commitment to end homelessness in the City of Norfolk within ten years.

Despite a healthy degree of skepticism, I stand before you today to report that we have made great progress.

Our most recent point in time count of the homeless showed a 25% decrease overall and a 40% reduction in the number of long-term or chronically homeless.

Our strategy has been to focus on long-term solutions, including a near doubling of permanent supportive housing, and to put into practice lessons learned across the country as more and more cities have achieved significant progress in this critical battle against the scourge of homelessness.

Today, we will review and discuss a new initiative in the City's aggressive campaign to end homelessness in ten years – The Faith Partnership. And that's why you have been invited here today.

Two weeks ago, I publicly challenged every place of worship in the City of Norfolk to support at least one homeless family in the transition from crisis to self-sufficiency.

I know that our city government is relatively late to the table in combating the moral disgrace of homelessness – you, the faith community has shouldered the burden of homeless and poor families for hundreds of years.

But today, we have the opportunity to join forces in a new way.

For more than twenty years, spending on homeless programs increased 400% and yet homelessness was not ended – the numbers actually increased.

The strategies we relied on – shelters, soup kitchens, short-term programs with lots of rules – were found to have little impact on the likelihood that a person would leave the streets.

Homeless people cycled between hospital rooms, jails, and shelters at a cost of \$40,000, \$60,000 – even \$100,000 per year to society. And at the end of the day, the homeless were no better off and the cycle and cost began all over again, year after year.

A new approach emerged – moving people quickly into housing and providing support to keep them successful. The approach worked. Cities like Philadelphia, San Francisco and, right here in Norfolk, started to see the numbers go down for the first time.

The promise of ending homelessness, not just managing it, moved from vision to action. Many of us who suffered from compassion fatigue have now become re-moralized. We see that with the right tools, we can end homelessness.

As mentioned, it makes sense from a cost effectiveness perspective, but more importantly it's the moral thing to do.

It's what our faith requires of us.

As my faith guides me -- the ultimate measure of our society is found in how we treat the least among us.

The Faith Partnership seeks to build on an important foundation of compassion and research about what works to ease the suffering of our poorest neighbors.

We've learned through our experience with some 900 families in the past year and the thousands who came before them that the critical difference for many families in escaping homelessness is positive relationships.

The faith community is uniquely positioned to provide these relationships for many families without strong social support – which is often the case among homeless families.

To participate, a congregation is asked to provide limited financial support to a homeless family. . . we estimate \$1,000. . . and to provide trained mentors who will support the family for at least a year.

The City will provide training and criminal background checks to prospective mentors, make referrals of homeless families, and provide ongoing support to the mentors as they work with a family.

I will also convene a Clergy Council that will have responsibility for reviewing the Partnership's progress and providing input to ensure its success. Please let me know if you are interested in becoming part of this effort.

The Faith Partnership presents us with an opportunity to end the ricocheting many families experience as they move from congregation to congregation seeking help.

It gives us the tools to work with homeless families in a systematic way that has been proven effective, and ultimately will give homeless children a fighting chance at stability and a stronger future.

Thank you - more about this later.

At this time, I'd like to introduce the Reverend Steve Jolly, our host and pastor of Freemason Street Baptist Church to bless our food.