



# DOMINICAN SISTERS OF SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

## CORPORATE STANCE: SCATTERED SITE HOUSING

We, the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, support a just, peaceful and amicable implementation of scattered-site housing in Springfield.

*November 1994*

### EXPERIENCE

The John Hay Homes, completed in 1941, was Springfield's biggest low-cost housing project for families. It and two other low-income housing projects were located on the east side of the city. The Hay Homes were falling into disrepair, asbestos and lead paint needed to be removed, and drugs and bullies had made the housing unsafe for families. In August of 1994, the Springfield Housing Authority announced plans to construct thirty-six multi-family public housing units in four different neighborhoods in Springfield.

Citizens of the areas selected to receive the multi-family dwellings were concerned about mixing these apartments with single-family homes. What would happen to their property values? Neighborhood Associations and neighbors alike cried "Not in my neighborhood."

In mid-September of 1994, thirteen Springfield Dominicans attended a Preaching Conference focused on "Preaching for Justice." Because of this experience, and along with the General Chapter Ordination mandating the study of racism, the Sisters felt compelled to address the issue of scattered site housing in Springfield. They invited church leaders and others who worked with persons experiencing homelessness and poverty to come together. Gathering accurate information, it became evident that racism was at the very heart of the controversy. More meetings of the newly formed Coalition for Housing Justice led to conversation and cooperation.

Today there is affordable housing built across various areas of the city. One partner is Habitat for Humanity who works with families to build homes for those who could not ordinarily afford it. Madison Park Place was built at the old site of the Hay Homes and consists of single-family homes, duplexes and apartment style living in safe and secure neighborhoods.

And yet the problem persists. Homelessness is increasing. Recent efforts to build a Center for Health & Housing with wrap-around services for persons experiencing homelessness have not been successful. Complex issues ranging from decades of disenfranchisement, racism, and lack of community will and leadership have defeated or at least minimized the project.

### ANALYSIS

A study and subsequent report by *Governing* magazine, "Segregated in the Heartland: In Springfield – and in cities across the country – government policies keep racial segregation in place" by Daniel C. Vock, J. Brian Charles and Mike Maciag. Feb. 7, 2019 notes the following:

- The Norfolk Southern railroad tracks at Ninth Street divide the city not only racially but also separate the availability of resources for development, infrastructure, quality of education and type of professional work opportunities.
- Government (federal, state and local) policies such as zoning for rental property, apartments, single family homes and public housing reinforce racial separations, as do policies concerning housing subsidies, tax incentives and restrictive covenants.

- Available tax resources to support schools are based on the school's location and thus are much lower in lower-income neighborhoods.
- Reports indicate that there is a difference in police response to incidents occurring in low and higher income areas. The former tend to be communities of color and the latter, white communities.
- Redlining, basing financial credibility on where a home is located, is illegal, but the reality is that well-established maps are still in place.
- The value of a similarly styled house doubles when the house is located in Springfield's west side.
- Recent studies show that 62% of black households in Illinois rent their homes, compared to 27% for white households. In Springfield's east side, nearly 50 percent of the renters spend one half of their paycheck for rent and utilities alone.

## REFLECTION

We are each of God, for God and expressions of God. We have an inviolable dignity. Anything that is offensive to that dignity is unjust. This must be our continual reference point for identifying injustice and in determining the ways we respond.

*Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world, both in rural areas and in large cities, since state budgets usually cover only a small portion of the demand. Not only the poor, but many other members of society as well, find it difficult to own a home. Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families. (152)*

Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis

The common good is the total sum of social conditions which allow people as groups and individuals to reach their fulfillment more fully or more easily. In order to be just, the sum of our institutions, cultural practices, and governance structures need to respect and allow human dignity to flourish. Questions we need to ask ourselves are, *Where is human dignity being degraded?* and *Does our solution restore and respect human dignity.*

*There is no longer any difference between Jew and Greek, or between slave nor freedman, or between man and woman: but all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)*

*If you truly believe...you will not discriminate between persons. Suppose a man enters the synagogue where you are assembled and he is dressed magnificently and wears a gold ring; at the same time, a poor man enters dressed in rags. If you focus your attention on the well-dressed man and say to him, "Come and sit in the best seat," while to the poor man you say 'Stay standing or else sit down at my feet,' have you not, in fact, made a distinction between the two? Have you not judged using a double standard? (James 2:1-4)*

## ACTION

1. Seek information on the housing picture in your town. How is it segregated? What are the housing issues in your neighborhood?
2. Be aware of the issues brought to the local zoning commission and to local organizations working on housing.
3. Support efforts of your neighborhood association to bring people together and welcome newcomers.