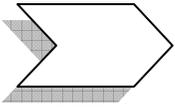


FIRST CHURCH SHELTER

A Just Peace Ministry of First Church Cambridge Congregational UCC
11 Garden Street Cambridge, MA 02138 617.661.1873 shelter@firstchurchcambridge.org



ADMISSION POLICY AND PROCEDURE

*Approved October 24, 1993
By Shelter Oversight Committee
Reviewed March 16, 2010*

The following, general admission policy is on file with the Massachusetts Executive Office Housing and Community Development, the principal funding source of the First Church Shelter.

Any homeless male, 18 years of age or older, is welcome to stay at the First Church Shelter providing that he:

1. Is not acutely psychotic and obviously in need of acute psychiatric treatment.
2. Is not obviously engaged in uncontrolled substance abuse, or:
3. Is not unwilling or unable to respect the rules governing the use of the Shelter. These rules are presented to each guest when they are interviewed for admission to the Shelter.
4. Is not a Registered Offender

Beyond the three, broad guidelines provided above, the following additional requirements will be followed.

We Are a Referral-Only Shelter

Because of First Church's legitimate concerns about unknown and potentially unstable individuals showing up at 11 Garden St. while other tenants are making use of the building during the day—especially the Newtowne School—we must be a referral only shelter. No potential guest should expect to access our facility simply by presenting himself at the Church during business hours. He must be referred to us by some credible individual or agency.

Since our beds are available to our guests for an extended period of time, it is also important that no potential guest arriving during the hours that the shelter is in operation expects to access our facility simply by showing up at the door. Because of our liberal and—for the needs of our guests such as laundry and AA meetings—useful curfew, we never really know which bed might be unused until after 10:30PM. Therefore, it would be unhelpful and irresponsible for us to encourage evening “walk in” candidates to expect First Church to be a realistic option for them.

Evening “walk ins” are also not possible for us to consider because of our commitment to the Church and other building users that our guests will be *unlikely* to return during the day and become a disruptive presence. It would not be possible for us to get a realistic sense of who we would be admitting simply by allowing potential guests to “refer themselves.” We need some sort of idea of who we are dealing with and what we might expect from them that only a referring professional or agency can offer.

Of course all of us realize that even the most committed and competent professional cannot guarantee what a person will or will not do. All of us have also been involved in situations when a referring party has misrepresented the situation of the person they are referring or “left out” important information. All this happens, and we need to take steps to minimize inappropriate referrals coming into First Church Shelter.

Even with the risks and problems described above, we still have a better chance of keeping stable census and useful service for our guests by only accepting guests who are referred to us.

The Shelter Director Makes Final Decision About Referrals

Because of the different concerns that must be balanced, and in order to minimize confusion about when a bed is available and who is going to fill it, the Shelter Director (or designee) will make the final decision about who is to be accepted as a guest of First Church Shelter. The input of all shelter staff is welcome and expected, but the final decision remains with the Director.

From Whom Can We Accept Referrals?

If we severely limit potential referral sources, we are likely to have problems getting beds filled quickly when a vacancy occurs. However, if we do not exercise some discernment over whom we accept referrals from we are likely to find ourselves getting stuck with some guests whom we are unable to help and who might not be able to function in our shelter.

The obvious answer to this problem is for us to be prepared to deal with any legitimate human service professional or service provider, but to remember those people who fail to respect our admission criteria or who withhold important information or provide us with misleading information about a potential guest. Experience has shown that “concerned” citizens, church members or clergy people are not NECESSARILY in a position to accurately assess a potential guest for us, and we should not depend upon them to do so.

Who Takes Referrals?

Whenever possible all referrals are to come through the Director during normal business hours. Obviously that’s not the way things always work. Referrals come in “around the clock.” Police officers, hospital ER staff, other shelter providers and human service professionals can and do call at all hours seeking to place a homeless individual sitting with them.

Should we have a vacancy PRIOR to 11PM, and a responsible shelter provider or human service professional (from a shelter, hospital or agency known to us) wishes to refer someone to us, the Shift Supervisor may accept that referral if and only if the referring party:

1. Is reasonably sure that the person meets the three requirements above
2. Accurately describes what we can provide to the person in need of shelter
3. Can assure us that the person can get to the shelter before 11:00 PM
4. Understands that, until the referral is reviewed and approved by the Director, the bed is available only for that night
5. Takes all responsibility for transporting or arranging for transportation.

The Shift Supervisor should contact the Director as soon as possible, either by phone that evening or through the Log Book. The Director will either approve or reject the referral on the basis of what the Shift Supervisor reports or seek further information. In nearly all cases a referral made under these circumstances should be processed in 24 hours.

No referrals should be accepted after 11:00 PM. There is really no way NOT to disrupt the other guests and provide a good night’s sleep for a potential new guest if the referral comes to us this late.

If there is a vacancy and a former guest of the First Church Shelter, who left voluntarily or to move into transitional or permanent housing, presents himself and requests shelter, the Shift Supervisor may allow him to stay providing that it is understood that the bed is available only for that evening until the Shelter Director reviews and approves his return to the shelter. Once again, in most cases this should take only about 24 hours, depending upon whether the Shift Supervisor can contact the Director that evening or must make use of the Communication Log.

Here, again, in order to minimize disruption, no one should be admitted after 11:00 PM.

Arranged Absences, Unclaimed Beds

It is our understanding that our funding source understands that we include those guests who fail to claim their beds or who are on arranged absences, providing they are clearly identified as being “no shows” or on arranged absences. If we are still providing services to a guest, or were prepared to provide services to a guest who fails to show up, we are entitled to list them in our nightly Guest Log and to include them as part of our monthly census reports.

Our funding source understand that a shelter has no control over whether a new or returning guest will show up tot claim a bed on any given evening. Our being prepared to serve that guest is what we are being funded for. DTA is also aware that each shelter is different and occupies different “niches” in the shelter ecosystem. Arranged absences, for reasonable periods of time, are recognized and supported as legitimate and valuable service to the homeless.