

# Minister Convicted for Offering Sanctuary

## “Rev. Drake’s homeless sanctuary is a red flag to city bigots.”

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By his opposition to the daytime youth curfew and the recent 30-days-and-begone restriction on motel occupancy, he has drawn the fire of local “law and order” Police Chief Richard Tefank. Drake regards Tefank as a leader of the current harassment campaign against his ministry.

Barbara Drake, married to Drake for 35 years, says the ministry under his leadership has cleared a seemingly unending series of hurdles laid down by the city, which demanded a special smoking area, a special shelter for the dumpster, day and night security guards, and finally a whole new enclosed building to house the homeless sleepers. Ninety architects volunteered for that project. A temp agency trained the homeless residents as security guards; they’ve now been employed at the Anaheim and L.A. Convention Centers.

While working out on these bureaucratic calisthenics, the church set up the city’s only accessible 24-hour restrooms for homeless people, and made available

showers, a pay phone, typewriter, and computer for the homeless. It provided pregnancy counseling, bus passes, minor auto repair, paralegal advice, spiritual counseling, medical care, financial advice, and active employment counseling.

Drake says his case-by-case decision process about whether to keep serving particular homeless people based on their progress and needs was rejected by the city in denying him permits. But all of the city-imposed obstacles were a mask for the baser political agenda of eliminating a functioning homeless center with a Christian ethic at odds with the upscale mercantile priorities of city planners.

Drake’s homeless sanctuary is a red flag to city bigots, who oppose his neighborhood meal line open to all, and his determination to let homeless people sleep on his property under the umbrella of the church. Drake maintains that the city-wide ban on camping and homeless property passed last year was a direct response to his church’s sanctuary policies.

In 1997, the Buena Park City Council compounded the misery with a vehicular dusk-to-dawn sleeping ban, prohibiting slumber for more than two hours at a time in vehicles on public property.

When Drake moved the homeless onto a church patio a year ago, Not-In-My-Back-Yard bureaucrats sent in a squad of inspectors seeking fire, safety, and health code violations and enforcing ever-new demands. When the City complained of visiting homeless people milling around and smoking, Drake put in a special smoking enclosure. When the City demanded a special structure to house the trash dumpster, and demanded another building, Drake agreed to build it.

Dozens of architects came out of the woodwork to volunteer their services to the church’s homeless program, but that still did not satisfy Buena Park. Drake tried mediation with the City, but the demands kept coming. Drake’s experience recalls that of San Francisco Food Not Bombs, where authorities likewise pursued an anti-homeless agenda with escalating demands that FNB repeatedly met, only to be hit with more restrictions.

Drake is also notorious as the lead backer of the Disney boycott’s controversial opposition to health benefits for gay domestic partners. Drake’s homophobic

agenda has provoked conflicting emotions among homeless activists. As a Christian fundamentalist, Drake believes homosexuality is a sin and a lifestyle choice, but also insists that he does not discriminate against gays at the church, asking them instead not to flaunt their lifestyle.

Larry Milligan, a long-time San Diego homeless activist, came to court to support Drake at his trial, bearing letters of support from the Catholic Worker and the American Friends Service Committee. Milligan was troubled by Drake’s fundamentalist anti-gay rights stance, but much more upset by the police invasion of the centuries-long tradition of church sanctuary and the palpable anti-homeless climate of Buena Park.

In terms of supporting the homeless, Milligan said, “Drake’s church is basically unconditional. Nobody else in Buena Park would do anything.” A homeless

case manager at the Hollywood Access Center who works with gay homeless people said: “As long as he doesn’t let his beliefs get in the way of trying to help people, we should support him.”

The ACLU has not officially joined Drake’s defense of the homeless, though individual members have privately supported him. Drake has joined the ACLU in opposing the lifelong food stamp cutoff to one-time felons.

Defense witnesses at Drake’s trial included homeless women who made headlines by testifying that Buena Vista police themselves had directed them to Drake’s property for safety; a homeless attorney given a map at police headquarters to Drake’s church; a terminally ill man; an expectant mother; and many homeless people who said that Drake had not asked them to come, but had been there for them when he was needed.

The prosecution produced city inspectors, police, and an embittered former church member who had turned state’s evidence to avoid prosecution.

Milligan emphasizes the underlying anti-poor agenda going on in Buena Park, located along the entertainment corridor including Knott’s Berry Farm, Movieland Wax Museum, and Ripley’s Believe It Or Not. “Though police witnesses denied it,” Milligan said, “three homeless guys told me that police woke them at 3 a.m. and ordered them out of town.”

Milligan has volunteered to come to Drake’s church and support the homeless, should Drake be jailed. Drake himself declares he will not take probation if that means evicting homeless people from his church. Now that the jury has returned guilty verdicts against Drake and his church, the judge is expected to issue a court order ordering the homeless to leave — thereby putting them out on the streets where they are illegal at night.

Will those determined to cover up poverty and eliminate religious sanctuary evict the homeless and jail Drake? Whatever the judge decides at Drake’s sentencing, the battle is far from over.

Support Rev. Drake with a letter at 6801 Western Avenue, Buena Park, CA 90621 or a call at (714) 522-7201.