

Civil Disobedience in Silicon Valley

15 Arrested in San Jose Mayor's Office During Sit-in for Affordable Housing

"It is shameful that in the heart of Silicon Valley, surrounded by such riches, that we have so little help for homeless people on our streets." — Rev. Scott Wagers

by Robert Norse & Becky Johnson

Rev. Scott Wagers of the Community Homeless Alliance Ministry (CHAM) led a group of 50 people to occupy the outer offices of Mayor Ron Gonzales in downtown San Jose on Wednesday night, January 26. The group waited two hours for the mayor to arrive, but he declined to meet with them. Fifteen people subsequently were arrested for waiting after working hours to see the no-show mayor.

Lt. Ruben Gazar, in civilian clothes, coordinated the arrests. The arrests were peaceful as participants fervently sang, "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "We Shall Not be Moved." Wagers has called for Mayor Gonzales to open shelters and housing for people who now must live on



Homeless protesters gather at San Jose's First Christian Church for a march.

the streets.

A mayoral assistant later announced that Mayor Gonzales was at a non-emergency medical appointment and praised

his policies towards the homeless. The assistant refused to commit the mayor's office to halting raids against homeless people on the streets, expanding homeless

services, establishing a clear policy for affordable housing — or even securing a future meeting.

Wagers, who says he is inspired by the words and works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has been petitioning Mayor Gonzales to provide leadership in easing the crisis created by nearly 20,000 homeless people on the streets of San Jose.

He voiced a blunt message for Mayor Gonzales: "Make something happen. No more words. Go before the City Council. Get us on the agenda. We'll ask for \$5 million and make it happen. Let's not put it off ten years. I saw how it happened over the last ten years — nothing happened. Next time tell him it's not going to be here in his office; it's going to be in City Council chambers with at least three times the numbers willing to go to jail. We'll be back."

CHAM wants \$5 million for an expansion of the successful CHAP program and other homeless services. The CHAP program, initiated under former Mayor Susan Hammer, helped move 50 families from the floor of the First Christian Church into housing in the last two years. Hammer