

INTERFAITH HOUSING CENTER OF THE NORTHERN SUBURBS

CREATING A DIVERSE, WELCOMING, FAIR COMMUNITY

ACTION STEPS FOR CONGREGATIONS

The housing crisis in the northern suburbs of Chicago has intensified to the point where rents and home prices are out of reach even for current residents and their families, and beyond the means of workers employed in most professions. Moreover, because of the high priced housing market, the effects of past racially discriminatory covenants, current practices of racial steering in the housing market, and perceptions that the “North Shore” is not welcoming, the area remains overwhelmingly white. Although the population of people of color in the sixteen suburbs of Interfaith’s service area doubled from 10% of the total in 1980 to 21% in 2000, most of this growth is Asian and Latino. Discounting the City of Evanston, the region is only 1% Black.

The benefits of diversity on the basis of income, race, ethnicity, disability, presence of children, and age, to name just some of the legally protected classes, have been documented. Diversity

- Reflects respect for each individual’s equality and civil rights;
- Adds variety to an area and thus enriches the lives of residents;
- Promotes tolerance of social and cultural differences;
- Provides a broadening educational influence on children; and
- Encourages exposure to alternative ways of life.

Religious congregations can take affirmative steps to foster diversity of the housing stock and the population that lives in it. This can be accomplished through: (1) *education*, (2) *direct service*, and (3) *advocacy*, and through the initiative of the *clergy/religious leader*, a *committee of the congregation*, the *congregation as a whole*, and *congregations working together*.

Education and Consciousness-Raising About Fair and Affordable Housing

1. **Preach and encourage study** by a social action or mission committee on the **subject of housing needs** in the northern suburbs and the moral response. An excellent template is a “study-action guide” and curriculum by the Wisconsin Council of Churches, “Opening Doors to Affordable Housing,” <http://www.wichurches.org/housing.html> This can be adapted to include fair housing, north suburban-specific information, and inter-religious oriented.
2. Ensure that congregation members know their **fair housing rights and responsibilities** as they consider **selling, purchasing, or renting homes**. You can do this through your outreach publications and through inviting the Interfaith Housing Center to make a presentation to your congregation or to appropriate committees.



3. Organize a public, interfaith **dialogue in your community on fair and affordable housing**, with an eye to dispelling myths and fears.
4. Devote an annual worship service to fair housing in April, **National Fair Housing Month**.

Direct Service for Affordable and Fair Housing

1. **Refer** parishioners/ members who need either additional income or services to stay in their homes, or who are looking for low-cost housing in the area, to the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs' **Homesharing Program**.
2. **Donate land** for new construction of **affordable housing**.
3. Organize a single or multi-congregational **effort similar to Habitat for Humanity** or Glencoe Interfaith Builders to **create or renovate affordable homes** through "sweat equity."
4. Encourage parishioners/ members who are **developers or landlords to create new affordable units** or to **preserve rental housing** they might own or control.
5. Identify **local employers** in congregations and **engage them in housing solutions** for low-income employees who have long-distance commutes.
6. "Adopt" a **Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 certificate holder**, senior or family, and assist in **locating housing** nearby (a landlord/property manager in the congregation might be solicited)
7. **Connect** members/parishioners who **need supportive services with agencies like Interfaith**; or work toward an integrated delivery of services along with the development of affordable housing
8. Encourage parishioners/ members to become **volunteer fair housing testers** for Interfaith, assisting in the investigation of discrimination complaints and the local housing market.
9. Capitalize and encourage donations to a local affordable **housing trust fund**. Sources of funds could include pension funds, private donations, and in-kind donations of homes. Uses could include emergency grants for tenants facing eviction, providing capital to develop affordable housing, etc.
10. Create a "**welcome wagon**" for **people of different backgrounds** moving in to your community.
11. Act as a neutral, confidential body in the community to **hear complaints of racial profiling**.
12. Ensure that your **house of worship is fully accessible** to persons with disabilities.



Advocacy for Affordable and Fair Housing

1. Create and adopt a “**Declaration of the Faithful**” or declaratory statement on **open and accessible housing**.
2. Organize parishioners/members into an **advocacy campaign** (similar to Wilmette Citizens for Affordable Housing, an initiative of the Peace & Justice Committee of St. Francis Xavier Church) to *regularly* attend local housing related meetings, initiate petition and letter-writing campaigns, and sponsor forums that “put a face” on issues of fair and affordable housing in the community.
3. Encourage parishioners/members to **join local housing or human relations commissions, or run for local office**.
4. Get involved with (or establish) a human relations commission in your community to create a strong mechanism to **deal with fair housing complaints and fair housing issues**. Work toward mandatory distribution by Realtors of fair housing information in every community (like Evanston and Wilmette).
5. Work toward establishing a **Housing Commission** in every community.
6. Directly encourage **local governments** to adopt and implement **affordable housing plans**.
7. Act immediately and loudly in **denouncing hate crimes** when they occur.
8. Co-sponsor a community-wide **day celebrating cultural differences** of residents.
9. Participate in regional, statewide, or national **housing advocacy campaigns**.
10. *And last but not least... Become an active member of the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs through assigning a congregational representative to attend meetings and events regularly, and create a strong action network across communities and denominations.*

Founded in 1972, with over 40 congregations and 15 civic organizations as members, the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs remains the only community- and faith-based fair housing organization in the Chicago area. Interfaith is rooted in the civil rights movement of the 1960s when a group of local women organized the North Shore Summer Project to protest housing discrimination. The group culminated its activities with a rally on the Winnetka Village Green in 1965, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to a crowd of 10,000, his first civil rights rally in an all-white suburb.

Interfaith promotes open housing through the investigation of discrimination, landlord/tenant and predatory lending complaints, education and advocacy programs that promote diverse and mixed-income housing in all communities, and by operating a shared housing program, Homesharing. Interfaith’s service area comprises the 16 communities of Deerfield, Evanston, Glencoe, Glenview, Highland Park, Highwood, Kenilworth, Lincolnwood, Morton Grove, Niles, Northbrook, Northfield, Park Ridge, Skokie, Wilmette, and Winnetka.

