

In the 1960s, Bob Dylan sang, “A hard rain is gonna fall.” It is falling hard in 2019. In the 1986 movie *Network*, Howard Beale says, “I am mad as hell, and I am not going to take it anymore.” In 2019, we all need to be mad as hell about how homeless youth, families, and individuals, and others who are the most vulnerable among us, are treated.

The terrible human tragedies resulting from recent The Drake Hotel fire have resulted in many individual and organizational efforts to meet the immediate needs of over 250 children, women, and men who lived there. The Minneapolis Foundation indicates it will raise up to \$1,000,000 to help provide short and long-term assistance to those needing it. There are calls from community organizations for more affordable housing, particularly for families, and improved, appropriate well-coordinated services and living wage employment to end homelessness and reduce the widespread poverty which directly contributes to it.

However, the time has come to stop doing what we are doing to eliminate homelessness because it will never adequately provide humane, decent housing and related support services for those needing it. In Finland, the number of homeless people has fallen sharply because of its Housing First concept. In Finland, those experiencing homelessness receive a small apartment and counseling – without any preconditions. 4 out of 5 people affected thus make their way back into a stable life. And this is less expensive than “managing” homelessness. We need to create our own version of Finland’s Housing First with a massive fundraising campaign to adequately provide for all those needing shelter and long-term housing. How much will this cost? Wrong question. The right question is when do we start?

Providing housing for those who cannot afford market rates is primarily a public responsibility. A Minneapolis Housing First campaign should raise funds from federal, state, county, and city government for construction and ongoing operational costs. When I was a senior program officer at The Saint Paul Foundation and The McKnight Foundation for over 11 years, I learned how much money can be provided for a particular cause by foundations, large corporations, and wealthy individuals for something they consider essential. They should consider Housing First essential and contribute substantial funding for it. In addition, Housing First should ask every person in Minneapolis, no matter their financial circumstances, to contribute with no amount being too little. To ensure individual giving is honored, not by its amount but by its intent, all individual gifts should be anonymous.

In a Minneapolis StarTribune story (12/26/19), Mayor Frey speaking about those made homeless by The Drake Hotel fire said, “We love them dearly, and we’re going to make sure that they’re safe and warm.” This suggests Mayor Frey and city government will do whatever can be done to end the pain and suffering of being homeless. In Minneapolis, we are proud of our extraordinary charitable giving by corporations, foundations, and individuals. We celebrate our ability to fully reach the goals, no matter how large, of countless fundraising campaigns for a wide variety of public and community purposes. We the people of Minneapolis even support the private sports businesses of billionaires with large amounts of tax dollars. Have no doubt. The money for a Minneapolis Housing First can be raised.

As the prophet Amos said, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” The time has come.