

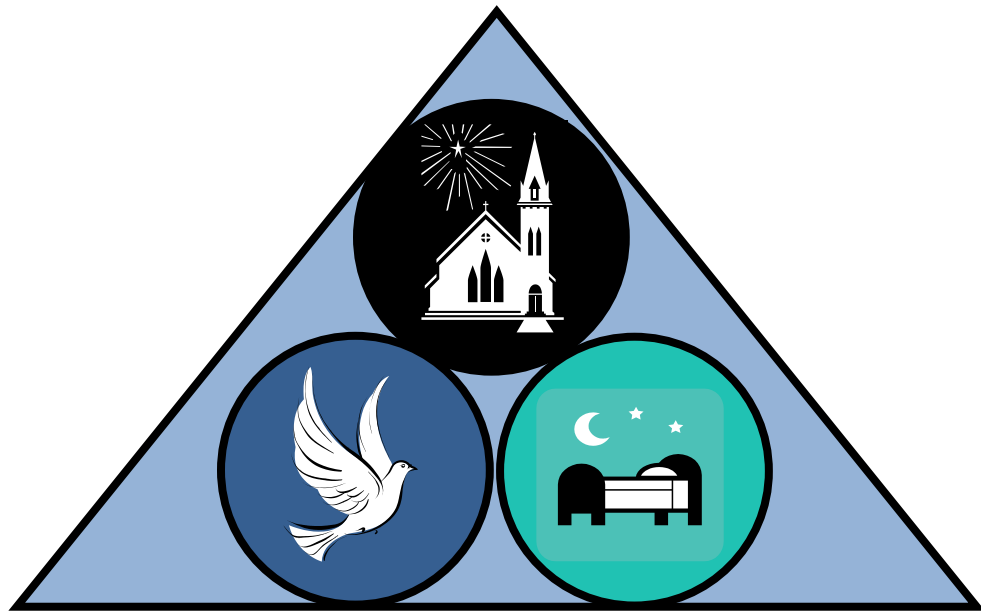


# *Safe Nights of Calvert County*

## **Program Operating Manual**

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*Providing cold weather shelter for  
homeless families and individuals*



*There truly is room at the inn...*

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## *INTRODUCTION*

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This manual outlines the procedures for the Safe Nights of Calvert County Program (hereafter referred to as Program). These procedures will be implemented by the Program Director in conjunction with the Safe Nights Board of Directors. It provides basic information about the Program including mission and objective, history, responsibilities, monitoring, host church shelters, eligibility criteria, screening procedures, guest requirements, training, and funding.

## *MISSION*

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To protect homeless families and individuals from winter weather by providing shelter in a clean, safe and warm environment. This effort grows out of a belief in the basic dignity of all. We believe that all who live in a society are connected to one another by our common humanity. We recognize that, for some, difficult or even insurmountable barriers stand in the way of this simple goal of a decent life. Thus, we believe that those of us who are privileged to live in comfort and security have a responsibility to reach out to assist others in distress, sharing our bounty.

## *OBJECTIVE*

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To organize, fund, and operate a program that will provide emergency shelter from November through March for families and individuals who meet eligibility requirements, who are experiencing homelessness, and who are capable of self-care.

## *HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM*

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The Program began operation in February 2008 and has built upon that experience. The Program was modeled after similar programs in other communities. As a pilot Program, shelters were held from February 3, 2008 through March 29, 2008. Six churches hosted shelters for one week each and one church hosted shelters for two weeks. Shelters were held daily from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

The Calvert Interfaith Council originally initiated discussion about a Safe Nights Program in September 2006. In November, 2007, a meeting was called based on concerns expressed by Project ECHO, Calvert County's primary homeless shelter, regarding the welfare of chronically homeless persons who are unable/unwilling to access services provided by local agencies and groups due to chronic mental illness, substance abuse, threatening behavior or criminal history. Representatives of Project ECHO, Calvert Interfaith Council, Calvert County Sheriff's Office, Maryland State Police, Human and Social Service Agencies, Calvert County Government, Calvert Memorial Hospital, and Catholic Charities attended this meeting. In December 2007, a presentation was made to this committee by representatives of Charles and St. Mary's Counties pertaining to their programs for the homeless. Following these presentations, Father Peter Daly, Pastor of St. John Vianney Catholic Church and President of the Calvert Interfaith Council, agreed to host a shelter week beginning on February 3, 2008. In January 2008, Program procedures were developed, host churches and volunteers were recruited and trained, publicity about the program was distributed, and the Program was implemented on schedule.

## *PROGRAM SUMMARY*

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The Program is a volunteer-driven, faith-based program operated and funded primarily by contributions from faith congregations, and individuals in Calvert County.

The Program's goal is to provide protection from the elements for some of the county's most vulnerable homeless individuals. Additionally, it is anticipated that providing temporary shelter and meals will assist these individuals and families to make progress toward their goal of permanent housing. The shelter hours of operation are 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. seven days a week. The Program offers participants an evening meal and a breakfast provided by the host church. A bag lunch may be made available.

All participating guests are screened as described in the section: Screening Procedures. Applicants who have not undergone screening procedures will be unable to participate in the Program. All guests are informed of and required to abide by the Guest Shelter Agreement, (Appendix A). Procedures have been established to ensure a safe and orderly environment for all. Continued participation in the Program is dependent on the guest's acceptance and compliance with these procedures. The safety of guests and volunteers is a primary concern. A Safe Nights Board of Directors has been established to provide assistance and support to ensure the Program has the personnel and resources to operate successfully.

The Program Director is responsible for the overall Program operations and for providing assistance and training for Host Church Coordinators. It is the responsibility of Host Church Coordinators to ensure that all shelter volunteers are instructed with regard to Program and shelter policies and procedures, including safety and emergency plans, their responsibilities and the boundaries of their role. In addition, they will ensure that guests are informed fully about the Guest Shelter Agreement, and their rights and responsibilities. Specific responsibilities are listed under Program Authority and Responsibility below.

Records of operation (i.e. guest and volunteer registers, incident reports, and guest files) are maintained and meetings are conducted to ensure prompt and effective problem solving and identification of opportunities to improve the Program.

## *PROGRAM AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY*

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Board of Directors:

- Advocates for services for the homeless.
- Provides leadership and support for the Program.
- Recommends sources and secures funding for the Program.
- Accounts for receipt of monetary donations and disbursement of funds.
- Identifies a Program Director for the Program.
- Manages the Program through the Program Director.
- Reviews operational policies and procedures for the purpose of recommending improvements and continued success of the Program.
- Facilitates communication between the Program Director and faith congregations.

- Facilitates coordination between the Program Director and other community organizations and local government.

Program Director *(with the help of an Associate Director as available, appointed and as duties are delegated by Program Director):*

- Develops and maintains the Safe Nights Operating Manual.
- Develops and implements operational policies and procedures for management of the Program.
- Provides training for Host Church Coordinators.
- Ensures that appropriate records of operations are maintained.
- Meets with Host Church Coordinators as necessary during the Program season.
- Maintains guest confidentiality at all times.
- Receives and acts on admission decisions and appeals of disciplinary action taken.
- Interacts with community organizations and local government as necessary.
- Prepares reports for the Board of Directors as requested.

Host Church Coordinator:

- Attends mandatory training as requested.
- Ensures that sufficient volunteers are recruited and substitutes are provided when necessary.
- Ensures that volunteers attend the necessary, mandatory training.
- Ensures that volunteers sign a confidentiality agreement.
- Coordinates delivery and storage of donations.
- Serves as the point of contact for other congregations assisting with shelter operations.
- Organizes transfer of program supplies with previous and future church coordinators.
- Serves as the point of contact for receiving the list of guests staying in the shelter each night.
- Maintains clean, safe, and positive shelter environment.
- Coordinates preparation of meals.
- Ensures that a minimum of two overnight monitors (one female and one male) is available for each night of the shelter week.
- Arranges for daily cleaning of the shelter facilities after departure of the guests.
- Ensures that guests are informed of shelter procedures and safety and security procedures.

- Maintains guest and volunteer sign-in records.
- Maintains guest files and incident reports.
- Reports on a regular basis to Program Director regarding status of shelter operation.
- Completes optional exit interviews with guests.
- Schedules volunteers to launder linens.
- Maintains guest confidentiality at all times.

## *PROGRAM MONITORING*

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To ensure that the Program fulfills its mission and meets the needs of the guests according to the standards that have been set, the Program Director will engage in a continual process of monitoring operations. In addition, Program evaluations will be conducted by the Program Director and reported to the Board of Directors as requested.

The Host Church Coordinator will maintain a roster of guests served, roster of volunteer staff on duty, and any unusual incidents regarding guests, such as illnesses, arrival of unscreened applicants, violation of guest rules, safety issues, disruptive events, etc. The responsibilities of Host Churches are outlined in the Host Participation Agreement (Appendix B).

Host Church Coordinators are encouraged to make suggestions and raise issues of concern with the Program Director as necessary. Any problems identified by the Host Church Coordinator will be noted to ensure proper operation of the Program. In most cases, Host Church Coordinators and volunteer staff will take immediate action to resolve problems during their shelter week as they arise.

Meetings will be held as necessary by the Program Director and Host Church Coordinators to review Program operations and conduct future planning. The Program Director will inform the Board of Directors of significant issues as necessary.

Host Coordinators will be asked to submit an evaluation following completion of the week(s) in which they host a shelter. The evaluation should include comments from the volunteers, suggestions for improvement of operations, and any problems experienced. The information so obtained will be used to inform the host churches that follow, and to improve operations of the Program.

A voluntary exit interview may be conducted with guests to assess Program success, opportunities for improvement, and further services needed.



## *HOST CHURCH SHELTER FACILITIES*

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The Program shelter will be housed in a facility of volunteer faith congregations in Calvert County on a rotating basis for one or two weeks each. Each Host Church will provide a clean, safe, and warm facility that can accommodate up to 20 homeless guests.

The facility will include separate restrooms for men and women. If sufficient shower facilities do not exist on site, arrangements may be made with a nearby organization such as a recreational facility, or community center to provide them. If it is not possible to provide showers, guests will wash in the restroom sink. Guests will be provided a cot, bed and bath linens, and toiletries.

Guests will receive an evening meal and a breakfast provided by the host church. In addition, a bag lunch may be provided at the discretion of the host church. No cooking by clients will be permitted. Volunteer food servers will receive training regarding rules for preparation and serving meals, and are expected to comply with such rules. Parents will be expected to provide food for infants.

Each facility must comply with health and safety regulations, fire code and other regulatory requirements of the jurisdiction in which it exists.

The program will be in operation at such facilities from approximately November 1 through March 31. Operating hours during this period will be from Sunday, 7:00 p.m. until the following Sunday, 7:00 a.m. No clients will loiter in the facility or on the property during hours that the shelter is not open.

## *GUEST ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA*

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The Program serves all homeless persons/families (otherwise referred to as Guests) regardless of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin. As part of the intake and assessment process, the guest will be submitted to a background check. In addition, the guest will have to show proof of residency in Calvert County, Maryland. The guest must be able to demonstrate that he/she does not require assistance to enter or exit a shelter facility. The guest must also be able to take care of his/her personal hygiene needs without assistance.

All guests must be alcohol and drug free while at the host church site, and adults must commit in writing for themselves and their family to comply with the behavioral standards of the facility as outlined in the Guest Shelter Agreement. Continued participation in the Program requires such ongoing compliance. If a guest is arrested while participating in the Program, readmission will be at the discretion of the Program Director.

In order to be determined eligible for participation in the Program, the applicant must meet the following basic criteria:

- Be a family with dependent children. Such a family is defined as one or two parents, with minor children present. The definition may be extended to include a grandparent or a guardian who has legal custody of a child or children. Or,
- Be a married couple without dependent children. Or
- Be a single man or woman without dependent children. And
- Be deemed homeless. Homelessness is defined as no access to traditional or permanent housing. The homeless may be finding temporary or occasional shelter in cars, on the street, in places not meant for human habitation, or staying on a rotating basis with friends or relatives. They may be living in severely overcrowded units (more than one family per unit). And
- Be able to physically enter and exit the shelter without assistance. And
- Be able to take care of his/her personal hygiene needs without assistance. And
- Be able to furnish proof of residency in Calvert County. And
- Commit in writing to comply with the Guest Shelter Agreement and policies regarding a release of liability, drug and alcohol use, and an informed consent for release of personal information. And
- Agree to a background check. And
- Have no history of violent criminal behavior, or sexual abuse.

In order to ensure that the Program is an appropriate placement for an applicant, all who apply will be asked to complete an Intake Assessment Form (See Appendix C). The Intake Assessment Form, in conjunction with information obtained in a background check, will be used to determine eligibility for acceptance into the Program.

## ***RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY CONCERNS***

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The purpose of Safe Nights of Calvert County is to shelter as many of the homeless residing in the county as possible. The Safe Nights program shall be inclusive rather than exclusive to the extent that is reasonably and safely possible. There shall not be any discrimination as to race, creed, or gender. However, because of safety issues relating to both the volunteers and the Safe Nights guests, the past criminal history of any potential guest must be taken into consideration and may be a reason for excluding that guest from participation in the Safe Nights program.

Safe Nights will not, and cannot, make any legal determination as to a guest's innocence or guilt as related to criminal matters. What Safe Nights will do is take into consideration a guest's past criminal history as contained in the court files on record at [www.casesearch.courts.state.md.us](http://www.casesearch.courts.state.md.us), or any other similar governmental database(s). Safe Nights has neither psychologists, counselors, parole officers, nor lawyers available to assist in making the myriad of decisions regarding a guest's acceptability. Therefore, it must rely heavily on these state-mandated databases.

To that extent, the individual completing the intake process for a Safe Nights guest is expected to follow the latest revision of the Intake and Assessment Instructions (Appendix K). In the event that there is either a question of ambiguity or Interpretation of the intake instructions, the individual performing the intake shall defer to the Program Director for guidance.

Under no circumstances shall an individual with an open warrant, as determined by the Calvert County Sheriff's Office, be admitted into the Safe Nights program. Likewise, any individual who appears on the Sex Offender Registry at [www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov) will not be admitted into the Safe Nights program. If an individual has been removed during the present shelter season for infractions, readmission will be at the discretion of the Program Director.

One must remember that Safe Nights does not possess any police powers. It must rely on the local authorities to enforce the law. The intake processes should serve as a screening tool to remove potential clients with violent backgrounds. It does not guarantee that a guest may, at times, exhibit forms of violent behavior. For this reason, it is important that all volunteers charged with maintaining order in a shelter not rely solely on their own interpretations when it comes to dealing with this type of behavior in the shelter. The various Safe Nights documents are quite specific with regards to this type of behavior. It is mandatory that 911 be called in situations of this type. The safety of both the guests and the volunteers is at stake and should not be compromised.

## *SCREENING PROCEDURES*

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Applicants for the Program are screened prior to participation to ensure that they meet the eligibility criteria described above. Screening/intake assessment is conducted by appointment. The ultimate purpose of the screening procedure is to ensure that the needs of the guests accepted could be safely met within the limited resources of the Program. During the screening process, potential guests will be assured of their right of confidentiality, and will be treated in a respectful manner.

Potential guests will be required to provide government-issued picture identification, or Drivers License, and vehicle registration documentation, which will be copied and placed in the guest file. Applicants will be fully informed about the Guest Shelter Agreement and must sign the Agreement, Safe Nights of Calvert County Release Form, A Drug and Alcohol Policy Form, and other forms for release of personal information as deemed necessary. Applicants must provide truthful information on the Intake/Assessment Form.

If the applicant is denied admission to the Program, every effort will be made to refer the applicant to other services for assistance. Applicants denied admission to the Program might appeal the decision in writing to the Program Director who will make the final decision. The Program Director will make a final determination on the merits of the appeal. A decision will be made and communicated within 48 hours of receipt of the written appeal.

## *GUEST REQUIREMENTS*

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All shelter guests must adhere to strict rules regarding their behavior as outlined in the Guest Shelter Agreement. Failure to meet these behavioral standards can result in removal from the Program as determined by the Program Director on recommendation of the Host Church Coordinator. Serious violations will result in immediate dismissal, and the Host Church staff on duty makes that decision at the time of the violation. Some violations will result in a written or oral warning. Decisions regarding removal from the program may be appealed in writing to the Program Director.

The Guest Shelter Agreement will be enforced. Below are rules the guests must follow. Failure to comply will result in IMMEDIATE DISMISSAL from the Program if the guest:

- Is found to be in possession of weapons, as defined in the Annotated Code of Maryland, or weapon-like objects.
- Is found to be in the possession of, in use of, or selling alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Uses obscene or abusive language towards shelter staff, other guests or family members.
- Exhibits violence of any kind.
- Exhibits chronic or repeated non-compliance with any shelter rule.
- Threatens a staff person or guest, or family member.
- Engages in sexual activity or sexual harassment.
- Steals from shelter guests or staff.
- Is found to be selling government-issued food cards.

Failure to comply with the following rules may result in dismissal from the Program:

- No open flame devices will be permitted
- No smoking in the shelter
- No visitors to the clients of the shelter will be permitted
- Guests will be expected to remain in the shelter for the night once they have entered, unless specific prior arrangements have been made
- Guests may not bring any food, except baby food, into the shelter
- No use of racial or sexual slurs
- Fails to properly supervise children

Length of stay in the Program will vary depending on the needs of the individual or family. It is anticipated that not all guests will require program services for the full duration of operations. Some will achieve their goal of permanent housing in shorter periods of time. Guests are encouraged to work their way towards self-sufficiency and stable employment and housing.

Children should continue to attend the schools where they have been registered prior to participating in the Program. Parents are responsible for obtaining proper transportation to the school. Parents are responsible for the care and supervision of their children at all times while in the shelter.

Guests will be expected to maintain their own space and belongings in good order. Only limited amounts of personal belongings can be accommodated at the shelter sites.

Guests in possession of prescription or over-the-counter medications must take all medications with them when they leave the shelter in the morning.

All vehicles parked at shelter facilities must be registered with the State and with the Program. The Program will maintain records of the registration information of all client vehicles. If guest vehicles are found to not be registered, they will be towed from the

shelter site. Ample parking is available at all sites, and no spillover parking onto adjacent streets is anticipated. Once a guest parks a vehicle at the shelter site they are not allowed to enter that vehicle until after signing out of the shelter in the morning.

Individuals with obvious signs or symptoms of active communicable illness that are deemed contagious or detrimental to the health of the guest or the general population will result in the guest not being admitted to the shelter, but being referred to the appropriate medical facility for treatment. Guests may be invited to complete a voluntary exit interview when they leave a shelter or the program to provide data to assess program performance, identify opportunities for quality improvement, and additional service needs of the guests.

## *TRANSPORTATION*

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Lack of adequate public transportation for the homeless to shelter facilities is a huge impediment. Until such time as the County or other sources make adequate funding available, every effort will be made to transport guests to and from shelters through a variety of resources. A combination of the following options may be used:

- The Calvert County public bus system
- Rented or leased 15 passenger vans, or similar vehicles
- Church-owned buses and vans, or
- Private vans or cars

## *HOST CHURCH SHELTER OPERATIONS*

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Faith Congregations will sign a Host Participation Agreement (Appendix B) to host a shelter for one or two weeks during the months of operation. The congregation will be responsible for providing a Host Church Coordinator, and other volunteer staff, including substitutes, when needed to conduct daily program operations (see Appendix J). The hosting congregation will provide a minimum of one male and one female overnight monitors. It is recommended that a minimum of two (2) volunteers, in addition to the

overnight monitors, be assigned to serve meals. It is recommended that at least one (1) volunteer be assigned to clean the shelter daily after guests depart. If showers are provided off site additional volunteers may be required.

In addition, the Host Church Coordinator will provide volunteers to set up the shelter operation on the Sunday of their assigned week, and volunteers to prepare cots for transport to the next congregation. Volunteers will also be required to launder bed and bath linens.

If possible, the Host Church Coordinator will meet with all guests on their first entry into the shelter to review their files, and to answer any questions about the Guest Shelter Agreement or procedures. Guests will be fully oriented to shelter operations, layout of the facility, and emergency procedures.

Overnight Monitors will be observant to ensure that prohibited items, such as weapons, drugs, or alcohol are not brought into the facility. All individuals entering the facility will sign in and out on a daily basis. Parents will sign in for children.

In order to ensure the safety and security of the guests, shelter staff, and the surrounding community, the Host Church Coordinator will ensure the following actions are taken:

- Volunteer staff and guests are instructed in health and fire safety and plans for emergency evacuations.
- Appropriate signs, including exit signs, are posted. A fire extinguisher is available.
- First aid supplies, and other emergency supplies for disaster preparedness are on hand.

The following will be maintained at the shelter facility in order to ensure appropriate actions by the staff:

- Program Operating Manual(s)
- Instructions on handling emergencies
- Rosters of guests and volunteers (Appendices F, G, H)
- File on registered guests (to be maintained in a confidential manner)
- Forms for recording and reporting of incidents (Appendix E)
- A telephone (cell or land-line) for use by staff only
- Appropriate telephone numbers in the event of an emergency (i.e.) police, fire, and ambulance
- Telephone numbers of the Host Coordinator and Program Director.
- A first-aid kit

- Emergency supplies consisting of flashlights and battery operated lanterns, radio and batteries, bottled water, and non-perishable food items
- Confidentiality Agreements signed by all volunteers who have contact with Guests (Appendix D)

## *TRAINING*

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The Program Director will ensure that training is provided to all Host Church Coordinators appropriate to the duties they will assume. The Host Church Coordinator will ensure that training of volunteers is conducted at each congregational site prior to each shelter week. Content will be based on the Program Operating Manual and other procedures established to operate the Program. The following topics shall be included:

- Guest confidentiality
- Supportive and respectful interactions with guests
- Appropriate guest/volunteer boundaries
- Program procedures and operations
- Volunteer Duties
- Safety and security plans
- Guest Shelter Agreement
- Intake/Assessment Process

## *FUNDING*

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Safe Nights of Calvert County is approved as a non-profit corporation as of October 26, 2009, and receives all funding from monetary donations made by individuals, churches, organizations and businesses. Host churches provide supplies, food, and shelter staff.

The Safe Nights of Calvert County Board of Directors is responsible for recommending and securing funding sources for the Program.