Three Homes

**Home:** one’s place of residence, domicile, house, the social unit formed by a family living together, a familiar or usual setting, congenial environment, the focus of one’s domestic attention (home is where the heart is), habitat, a place of origin (salmon returning to their home to spawn), headquarters, an establishment providing residence and care for people with special needs, the objective in various games, out of jeopardy, in a comfortable position with respect to some objective, to a vital sensitive core (the truth struck home)

**At home:** relaxed and comfortable, at ease (felt completely at home on the stage), in harmony with the surroundings, knowledgeable (teachers at home in their subject fields), on familiar ground

Each of us “resides” in three homes.

The **first home** is our physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual being – our personhood. We receive our first home through birth. Early in our lives, others are given primary responsibility for our care and nurture. Gradually we take on more of this responsibility for ourselves.

This home must be kept warm, dry, safe and in good working order. It needs exercise, rest, nutrition and proper maintenance. It also needs to be nurtured and maintained through intellectual stimulation, emotional support, behavioral regulation, time for reflection and development of a sense of purpose and meaning in connection to the outer world.

Although we are wonderfully and complexly made with the ability to do remarkable things, we are also created with considerable fragility and vulnerability. Even the strongest among us experience great frailty at times. Each of us requires the sustaining efforts of others in order to thrive. Despite our best self-care efforts, we still need the skillful, compassionate care of others.

Our **second home** is the place where we lay down our heads, our housing, where we “nest.” It refers not only to a physical structure in a particular location but also to the kind of living environment we create within it.

Like the first home, this home has physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual attributes. It offers safety and protection from the elements and the outside world. It provides private space in which to properly attend to hygiene, rest, and nutrition needs. This home serves as a base of operations and a place to keep and use one’s possessions. It offers a place of welcome, familiarity, and stability.

In this home we can welcome guests, share in celebration and suffering, be creative and silly, be still and mindful, be intimate with loved ones, and find renewal of energy and purpose. The very structure and design of housing in our cultural context facilitates these functions. For example, we construct a foundation (stability, grounding), walls (protection, privacy), a roof (shelter, protection from the elements), doors (welcoming, shutting out), and windows (light, connection with the outside world).
Space is often divided into a living room (relaxation, socialization, play), kitchen (hospitality, nutrition), bedroom (rest, intimacy), bathroom (hygiene), study (intellectual stimulation, meditation), closets (secrets), and a yard/garden (play, relaxation). This second home provides the necessary context for meeting the needs of the first home and an important foundation and link to the third home.

The third home in which we reside is the larger community, or more accurately, the multiple communities, from the local to the global, in which we are located. Here our interdependence with other people and organizations is fully evident. It is in the context of these various communities that we fulfill various roles and participate in the life around us. We give and receive, produce and consume, lead and follow, serve and are served.

There are numerous resources and opportunities for participation in this third home that permit us to meet the needs of our first and second homes. For example, it is in the context of the larger community that we are connected to health care, education, work, food procurement, transportation, socialization, purchasing goods, entertainment, the arts, politics, recreation and community service. This third home provides the social, economic, service and cultural context for our lives.

What implications does this notion of “three homes” have for homeless service providers? People on the streets often lose a sense of being “at home” in their own bodies, minds, and spirits; have no housing to call home; and are disaffiliated from a meaningful role and purpose in the larger community.

If we are to help people end their home-less-ness, we are compelled to direct our efforts to not only addressing people’s basic survival needs, but to go much further. We must advocate for and assist people in finding safe, affordable housing in which they can become “at home.” We must provide compassionate care and access to services that help people become more “at home” in their own bodies, minds and spirits. And we must support and assist people in finding meaning and a sense of belonging in the larger community.

Helping others move towards a greater sense of being “at home” in their lives begins with our very first encounter with people. Home is fundamentally relationship-based. By offering a hospitable presence – “creating a free and friendly space for the stranger” (Henri Nouwen) – one makes it possible for the other person to experience a taste of being “at home.” The seeds planted in such a relationship can go a long way to help someone take the necessary steps towards greater stability in all three homes of their lives.

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