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## Pastor's Column

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### North County Solutions for Change

Many of you are familiar with the work of Fr. Joe's Villages in San Diego. Fr. Joe and his Organization have been doing miraculous work with the homeless for many years now. Here in North County we have an Organization that is doing the same kind of work—North County Solutions for Change (NCSC).

St. Thomas More Parish has gotten behind this work because it is nearby, located in Vista, and because it is so remarkable in addressing and solving the issues of homelessness for the people of our own community.

NCSC was founded in 1999 by Chris and Tammy Megison because they didn't think it was right for babies to be sleeping on the floor of an emergency winter shelter.

Prior to starting NCSC the Megison's developed and directed work and housing programs that helped thousands of homeless men get jobs, pay rent, and earn their way back into society through an intense boot-camp style program.

Their most notable achievement was recognized as being the creators of one of North County's most successful social purpose micro-enterprises, the North County Times Hawker program (those guys selling papers on the streets). Chris and Tammy built the program from the ground up, and over its first seven years developed it into one of the most successful newspaper street-selling operations in the nation, expanding it to three other daily newspapers in eighteen cities in San Diego, Orange County, and Los Angeles.

In 1999 they encountered a startling new reality of homelessness as a nine-year-old homeless girl with her baby sister and their mother bedded down for the night on the floor of an emergency shelter. As dozens more families came to the shelter, the Megison's realized that they were confronted with an enormous problem. Not just because there were many families in crisis needing help, but because the entire homelessness response system was woefully inadequate to deal with the needs of homeless families. Big solutions were in order, and so with the help of other community leaders and entrepreneurs, they struck out with their plans.

From their original 300-square-foot office in downtown Vista, they began casting a vision around solving family homelessness. The vision was different in that it did not include more shelter beds, feeding programs, or traditional human services, but rather an audacious plan to create access to permanent solutions using a hybrid model that the couple developed. All the parents being helped would work, pay rent, attend onsite workshops and classes,

and be engaged in a dynamic coaching system. The model, now known as the Solutions University, blends affordable housing, educational opportunities, employment training, and health-related solutions all within one cohesive strategic partnership. There is but one goal: work with this community to solve family homelessness for children and communities, permanently. By doing so, the futures for children can be transformed.

As Pastor, I have encouraged our Parish involvement in the NCSC endeavor. Parishioners and Staff Members have come forward and are turning my words of encouragement into Parish reality and support for NCSC.

Many Parishioners have come forward to provide meals for the residents at NCSC, and Kathleen Bell is co-coordinating a program to collect used books which are donated to NCSC and then sold on the internet. Dick and Charlene Belprez, the Chair-couple of our Social Ministries Committee, have stepped forward and created a special outreach committee specifically for the purpose of acting as a liaison to NCSC. Chris Smith, our Director of Stewardship and Development, is on the NCSC Board of Directors.

I am on the "Finding Our Way Home" Leadership Team along with Mark King, CEO of TaylorMade Golf; Sam Abed, Mayor of the City of Escondido; Danny Ashcroft, CEO of Western CNC, Inc.; Bobbi DePorter, President of Quantum Learning Network; Gloria Foote, CFP of Partner Financial Focus; Matt Hall, Mayor of the City of Carlsbad; Rev. Ted Hamilton, Pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church; Darrell Issa, Congressman of the 49th District; Chris Lischewski, CEO & President of Bumble Bee Foods; Judy Ritter, Mayor of the City of Vista; Sandra Shuda, Vice President of Watkins Manufacturing; Mike Simmons, Executive Vice President of DEI Holdings; and Jim Wood, Mayor of the City of Oceanside. I share these names with you so that you can see the wide community support that NCSC has garnered.

To learn more about NCSC go to their website, [www.solutionsforchange.org](http://www.solutionsforchange.org), or check Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

This weekend, at all the Masses, you will have heard the NCSC story. Whatever support that you can give will be greatly appreciated and will go a long way to help end homelessness in our own community!

Fr. Mike